

WHERE IS GOD

WHEN HARD TIMES HIT?



BAYLESS CONLEY

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INTRODUCTION

One thing common to every one of us as human beings is difficult times. No one is exempt.

We all face hard times and they often hit when we least expect them. Life can seem to be going along great when, all of a sudden, things are pulled out from under us and we are thrown into circumstances beyond our control.

You and I can begin to wonder where God is in the midst of our troubles. It may seem and feel like He is nowhere near. But I want you to know that when you face those times, you are not alone. God knows and understands what you are facing. He is there in the midst of your pain, suffering, and struggle.

WHERE IS GOD WHEN HARD TIMES HIT?

There's a great story found in 1 Kings about the prophet Elijah. His life was going great. He had experienced victory after victory over the prophets of Baal and had seen the favor of God in an amazing way.

But all of a sudden, he found himself under attack and it seemed like his world was coming apart. Elijah was shaken. Spiritually, emotionally, and physically, he was in jeopardy. Like you and me, he was searching for God in the midst of his struggle and pain.

You and I can learn a lot from Elijah's life—and God's response. Through a look at his story and how God responded, we can understand where God is when hard times hit.

WHERE IS GOD WHEN

HARD TIMES HIT?

When we pick up the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19, we find that the entire nation of Israel had backslidden from God. Ahab, their king, and his wife, Jezebel, had led the nation into idolatry.

God had promised that if Israel forsook Him, He would shut up the heavens and there would be no rain. But God didn't fulfill that promise immediately. Year after year, rainy season after rainy season, those thunder clouds rolled in. The heavens gave their rain and the earth produced its crops.

The heavens remained open until Elijah prayed. That's when the rain stopped and the result was a three-and-a-half-year drought.

During this time, Elijah was taken care of supernaturally. First, as he stayed by the

Brook Cherith where ravens came and fed him, and then in a city called Zarephath, where a widow sustained him through miraculous means.

After a long period of time, God said, "Now go reveal yourself to Ahab." So Elijah went to King Ahab who accused him of being Israel's problem. But Elijah responded by saying, "No, you're the problem, king."

This confrontation brought about a showdown on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the false prophets of Baal. All of Israel gathered together to see this contest. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to call out to their god as he called out to the living God. Whichever one answered by fire, that would be the god they would serve.

Well, the prophets of Baal did everything they could to get their god to send fire from heaven. Throughout the day, they cut themselves with knives, they cried, they prayed. They did everything they could think of, yet nothing happened.

Elijah just stood to the side and mocked them. It's really quite funny if you read some of the things he said. First Kings 18:27–28 (MSG) says,

By noon, Elijah had started making fun of them, taunting, “Call a little louder—he is a god, after all. Maybe he’s off meditating somewhere or other, or maybe he’s gotten involved in a project, or maybe he’s on vacation. You don’t suppose he’s overslept, do you, and needs to be waked up?” They prayed louder and louder, cutting themselves with swords and knives—a ritual common to them—until they were covered with blood.

But there was no fire. Then it was Elijah’s turn.

Elijah set up the altar, dug a trench around the altar, and doused the sacrifice and firewood so much so that even the trench was filled with water. Then Elijah called out to God and God answered by fire, consuming the sacrifice, wood, stones, and water.

WHERE IS GOD WHEN HARD TIMES HIT?

The nation fell down and worshiped, saying, "The Lord is God! The Lord is God!"

Then Elijah killed all those prophets with the edge of the sword, after which he had a little prayer meeting. Soon clouds began to form. He told Ahab that rain was on the way and that he had better move quickly before he would be overwhelmed by the coming rain.

You would have to agree that Elijah had been used by God in a mighty way to turn a nation back to God. He used him to shut up the heavens and then to open the heavens miraculously. He used Elijah to defeat the false prophets and to bring the nation of Israel back to worshiping God. Elijah had been the tip of the spear to cause all these things to come to pass. Life was one victory after another!

Then we come to 1 Kings 19:1–19, and here is what we learn:

And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the

gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.” And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went 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 prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!”

Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise and eat.” Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.” So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the 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; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the

cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

And he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Then the Lord said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.

It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him.

Elijah had a mountaintop experience, a marvelous breakthrough, and was used by God to turn a nation back to the Lord. Yet very soon after, he was running for his life and on the verge of suicide.

Friend, it's always wise to keep your armor on. After great victories, it's not unusual to experience great trials and temptations. Look at King David. After God used him in a mighty way to bring victory to Israel, you find him getting involved with Bathsheba and falling morally (2 Samuel 10–11). Then there's Samson, who after killing a thousand Philistines and being used by God to bring great deliverance, begins to talk of dying and falling into the hands of the enemy (Judges 15:14–18).

Even Jesus experienced difficult challenges on the heels of great moments in His ministry. For example, He was confronted

by a demon-possessed boy after He had been on the Mount of Transfiguration when God came down and spoke to Him in a cloud (Matthew 17:1–18).

Sometimes we're the most vulnerable after we've experienced the highest and brightest times with God. Right after we have won a victory or have a great spiritual experience, we tend to relax in our vigilance. Instead of being spiritually alert, we act like a soldier who foolishly puts his sword and shield down after a battle. We, like him, are taken by surprise by an enemy that is far more determined than we anticipated.

We need to always keep our armor on.

But back to the story of Elijah. At this critical and difficult time, he needed some fresh direction. Perhaps you are in a very stressful or critical time yourself right now, and you need guidance from God. If so, I'm going to share with you four thoughts from this story to help you know that God is there for you in your pain and how you can hear from Him when you're under pressure or when there is a crisis going on in your life.

REALIZE THAT ZERO IS NOT

A BAD PLACE TO BE

When this crisis arose in Elijah's life, when his life was threatened, he knew he needed to hear from God. So it came into his heart to go to Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai. That's the same place where God had spoken to Moses from the burning bush. And it's the same place that God had spoken to all of Israel and Moses after the Exodus.

Elijah knew that, so he headed to Mount Horeb. We know that was his intended destination because when the angel began to minister to him, the angel told him he needed to eat because the journey was too great for him. It's quite obvious that Elijah knew what and where he was referring to.

But before he could get too far, he sat down under a tree, ready to give up. He said, "I've had enough. I just can't take anymore. I'm played out. I'm used up. I'm done."

Maybe today you're on the verge of quitting. You figure, "I've had enough. I'm done. Enough pressures, enough hassles, I'm at the end of my strength. I can't ride this thing out anymore. I've had enough problems in my marriage, enough financial pressure, enough harassment on my job, enough struggles over my health, enough bad reports about my kids. I can't take any more. My strength is gone!"

Maybe you've even sunk to the depths that Elijah had and you're thinking, "God, just take my life. Lord, it would be easier if I just died and went home to be with Jesus. I wouldn't have to face this tomorrow morning when I wake up." Maybe you've even bought the lie the devil has whispered in your ear: "Your spouse and your kids would be better off without you, and no one else would really miss you either."

Let me assure you that is just a lie of the devil!

Did you notice that when Elijah was at the end of his strength, God intervened? Being at the end of yourself, being at zero, is not a bad place to be—that is, if you'll look to God.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, we are given this insight:

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

When Paul was being harassed by an evil spirit—"a messenger of Satan" that he also referred to as a thorn in the flesh—he got to the end of his rope, the end of his strength. He besought God three times for deliverance. The Lord's answer to Paul was quite revealing.

First, He said, "My grace is sufficient for you." The Greek word translated *sufficient* literally means "to raise a barrier against." In other words, "My grace will protect you—it's all you need." Next He said, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." Yes, God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

That means God's strength comes to full maturity in our weaknesses. It blossoms and is expressed fully when we get to zero.

Paul went on to say, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

This is a secret that we need to learn, friend. God's strength can be made perfect in weakness. There's another passage that helps us understand that zero is not a bad place to be. It's 2 Corinthians 1:8–10, which says,

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.

Notice that Paul speaks of past deliverance, which leads to confidence for both present and future deliverance.

Maybe you're in a situation that's beyond your strength right now. That's not a bad place to be as long as you have **the sentence of death in yourself** and you're looking to God for your deliverance.

I'll never forget the time early in my ministry when my wife and I took some time off and went on a ten-day camping trip in my Volkswagen van. We drove up the California coast and on the way back we stopped in Northern California to see some friends we hadn't seen in a long time.

We spent the night with them and the next day when my friend and I were taking a walk, he shared with me some of the troubles they were going through. There was some really hard stuff going on in the church and he was having some severe physical problems that could have been life-threatening.

But in the middle of our walk he just looked at me and said, "Bayless, I'd be worried if I was trusting me. But I have the sentence of death in myself, and my trust is in God." I knew right away he was referring to the Scripture we just read. He was admitting his situation was too big for him, that it was beyond measure, something that he couldn't cope with. He was at zero. But he said, "I'm not worried because my trust is in God."

Zero is not a bad place to be.

Finally, look at Acts 27:20–26. In this passage we find Paul and his companions, along with quite a few other people, on a ship that was caught in a horrible storm. Here is what Paul says about that experience,

Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.

But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just

as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island.”

Notice that when they were in the midst of a horrible storm, when they were at the end of themselves, **when all hope was finally given up**, God spoke to Paul and gave him direction. Now I’m sure they were praying every day and every night for many days as this tempest beat on them. But it wasn’t until they came to the end of themselves, until all natural hope was thrown out, until they knew they couldn’t get themselves out of their situation, that the angel appeared to Paul, and Paul received the direction that they needed.

Are you going through a storm right now? If you are, I’m going to say it again: Zero is not a bad place to be. It seems that sometimes we have to get to the end of ourselves before we will fully look to God. But when we do, we find that He is there and that He is more than enough.

If you find yourself there right now—or close to that point—lay hold of God’s strength. Put your trust in Him. He will bring you to the

place of your breakthrough, and you will find the direction you need. But don't rely on your own strength.

Zero is the worst place to be if you're not trusting God! But if you have your hope and your trust anchored in Him and you've taken hold of His strength, things will be all right. So if you're at zero, cheer up. Understand what it means to have the sentence of death in yourself. Don't trust yourself, but trust the living God who has delivered, does deliver, and will yet deliver you.

LIGHTEN THE SHIP

The second principle we glean from Elijah's experience is to lighten the ship—to cut loose relationships and other things that are hanging you up and keeping you from achieving what God has for your life.

This is exactly what Elijah did. When he received the threat from Jezebel, he ran from Jezreel to Beersheba (something like eighty miles!) and at that point he cut loose his servant.

Look at 1 Kings 19:3,

And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

Elijah never came back for this guy—ever. He just cut the guy loose. He left him there.

End of story. You never find him mentioned again in the Bible.

Now this servant may have been somebody that Elijah picked up on his own. He may have been someone that was recommended to him by another person. But he was not God's choice for a successor because, as we read at the end of the story, God told Elijah, "Go anoint Elisha to be prophet in your place."

This servant, whomever he was, was the wrong person. Maybe he was hindering Elijah's progress. Maybe he was keeping him from where he needed to go. Whatever the situation, Elijah cut him loose and never went back for him.

I think we need to take stock of our relationships from time to time to determine whether they are aiding us in fulfilling the will of God or are baggage that's weighing us down and holding us back. You can't walk with fools and get the reward of a wise man. The Bible says a companion of fools will be destroyed, but he that walks with wise men will be wise (Proverbs 13:20).

Now when I'm talking about evaluating your relationships with other people, of course, I'm not talking about your marriage. But there are some relationships you need to cut loose because they are keeping you back and hindering you from getting to where God wants you to go.

I find it interesting that it wasn't until Abraham separated himself from Lot that God showed him the Promised Land. As soon as he cut his relationship loose with Lot, God showed him what He had for him.

Right after I was saved, I was living above a bar in Ashland, Oregon. It was a room owned by a friend of mine. That's when I met a Christian guy who had a background similar to mine: drinking, drugs, the whole deal.

We started to hang out some, but time after time I found myself having to pick him up off the floor. He was always stumbling one way or another. He'd go out and get drunk, or he'd go out and get high, or he'd mess up with some girl. I can't remember how many times I prayed for this guy and tried to help him!

One day I left town and let him stay in my place. That was a mistake! He messed it up so badly that I ended up in trouble with my friend whom I was renting from. In fact, it took me a week to get the smell out of my room!

After that, I got him a job with a Christian lady who owned a peach orchard. I vouched for him. He turned up the first day, but he never turned up again. That got me in trouble with my boss.

So then I was in trouble with my friend whom I rented from and also in trouble with my boss, yet this guy was still wanting to hang around with me. But he was dragging me down. And even though I was a young Christian, I was wise enough to realize that this guy was a fool. If I kept hanging around with him, he was going to end up influencing me rather than me influencing him, because he didn't want to change.

So one day I cut him off! I said, "That's it, man. I'm done with you." It was one of the wisest things I ever did. I probably wouldn't be where I am today in my walk with God

had I not made the decision to jettison that relationship.

I'm convinced that when God wants to bless you, He sends a person into your life. And when the devil wants to mess you up, he sends a person into your life. You need to have the wisdom and the discernment to determine which is which.

Sometimes we just need to lighten the ship and cut certain relationships out of our life.

We also need to cut loose any other baggage that we shouldn't be carrying. Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us,

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

It's obvious that we need to deal with the sins in our life. But we are told not just to lay aside the sins, but to lay aside the

weights as well. Weights are those things that may not be a sin to you, but are a burden to you and hold you back from achieving and fulfilling what God wants for your life.

For example, watching TV may not be a sin, but it can sure be a weight. And it can sure be a hindrance that keeps you from hearing from God, especially when you're in a time of crisis. One of the worst things you can do when you are in a crisis situation is sit in front of the tube instead of having your Bible in front of you.

So if you really want to hear from God and get yourself unstuck and progress, then get rid of the baggage. Lighten your ship.

This is exactly what the apostle Paul said they did in Acts 27:18–19 when they were caught in the midst of the storm:

And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship. On the third day

we threw the ship's tackle overboard
with our own hands.

Sometimes in a storm you need to throw some things overboard. In fact, when you're in a crisis, it's a great time to evaluate any baggage that you're carrying in your life. We tend to not evaluate the things we have allowed into our life until we get in a storm. So if you find yourself in a tempest today, take the time to survey the things in your life and see if there aren't some things that you need to jettison and get rid of.

MAKE TIME FOR REST

You'll notice that in Elijah's situation, he slept, then he got up and ate the food and drank the water that the angel had prepared for him. And then it says after he ate and drank, he laid down again and rested. Then he got up again, and he ate again.

Maybe you're struggling today and the problem is you're just sleep deprived and you don't eat right. You need to understand that your body, soul, and spirit are all tied together. What you do to one affects the other two. We are intricately woven together.

So perhaps the wisest thing you could do today is give your body a rest because it is affecting every other part of your life. Get a good night's sleep and some home cooking.

If, in fact, you are sleep deprived and you're not taking care of your body, there's a good

chance that everything is blown out of proportion. To you, it looks like your whole world is falling apart when it really isn't. It's like Mark Twain said, "I have known a great many troubles in my life, most of which never happened."

I don't know about you, but I get cranky when I'm tired. My flesh tends to get the better of me and things seem worse than they really are when I get exhausted and stop taking care of my body.

If you're like me, you've probably gotten into a fight with your spouse, your children, or a friend that you would have never gotten into if you hadn't been exhausted, right? And you could have avoided that confrontation if you had just gotten some rest.

You're not superhuman. You need to rest. You need to have a Sabbath day away from the grind. Even God took a day and rested on the seventh day of creation—and He didn't need a rest. But He took a day of rest as an example to you and me. And if the Creator who didn't need a rest took a rest

day as an example to us, don't you think it's important? Friend, if you work 24/7, it will take a toll on you.

There's a second application to this point that I need you to consider. If you look at this story from a spiritual standpoint, the bread represents the Word of God and the water represents the Spirit, or prayer.

If you're in a crisis and you need to hear from God, saturate yourself in the Word of God. Like Elijah, eat the bread of life, and then eat some more. Pray, and then pray some more. Saturate yourself in the Scriptures and find time—a lot of time—to pray. It's amazing. If you will do these two things, God will begin to speak to you.

If you'll pray, especially in the Spirit (and by that I mean praying in other tongues), it will refresh you spiritually. In Isaiah 28:12, Isaiah prophetically looks forward to the new covenant and makes reference to speaking in tongues when he declares, "This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest," and "This is the refreshing." In fact, these

verses are quoted by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 in reference to the infilling of the Holy Spirit and speaking in other tongues. To get refreshed spiritually, pray in the Spirit. Praying in other tongues will bring rest and refreshment to your spirit, and feeding on the Word of God will bring nourishment to your spirit.

Picture someone who's been lost in the desert for a long time. He's had no food or water for days and is just skin and bones—absolutely famished, totally dehydrated with hardly any strength remaining. When somebody's in that kind of state, they're not too open to instruction and direction.

If you found such a person, the first thing you would do is get them water and food, and make sure they got some rest so they could rebuild their strength. Once they were rehydrated and began to get some nourishment and their physical strength began to revive, that's when they would be in a position to take instruction and direction.

Spiritually, it is the same thing. When you are spiritually malnourished and weak, you need to rehydrate and nourish your spirit before you're in a place where God can give you the kind of instructions He has for you. You need to take time in the Word and take time waiting on God.

So when you are in a crisis, make sure you take care of yourself. Get some rest. And make sure you are feeding on the bread of life and spending time in prayer. Then you'll be ready for your instructions from the Lord.

REFRESH YOURSELF ON

HOW GOD LEADS YOU

In 1 Kings 19:11–12, Elijah was told by God to stand outside the cave on Mount Horeb:

Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the 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; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

There was the strong wind, which tore the rocks, but God wasn't in the wind. Then there was the earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake. Then there was the fire, but

God wasn't in the fire. And then it says, "a still small voice."

To fully understand and appreciate what God was doing with Elijah at this moment, you have to go back to the time when God spoke to Israel and to Moses on Mount Sinai. Elijah was at the exact same place.

When we look back at that occasion when Moses and the people gathered together on Sinai, we find that God came down in three distinct manifestations. First, God came in a tempest, there was a strong wind. Then there was an earthquake. And, finally, there was a fire.

Then a trumpet sounded and they heard God speak audibly. When that happened, everyone freaked out and said to Moses, "Look, Moses, we don't like this. You go talk to God. And whatever you tell us He says, that will be fine. But we don't want God speaking to us directly anymore."

Now Elijah knew all of this. He knew that God appeared to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai—the very place he was standing—in a

strong wind, an earthquake, and a fire. God was using this historical setting to teach Elijah, and us, a valuable lesson.

That lesson is actually outlined in Hebrews 12:18–25. Here is what that passage says:

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”)

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge

of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.

Elijah was standing on Mount Sinai, the same place where Moses had stood. His mind was filled with these thoughts: "I've got to hear from God. I'm in a crisis. God, what do I do next? They want to take away my life. I'm the only one left. They've torn down Your altars, and they seek to take my life. I need to hear from God like Moses heard from God! I've got to hear from God. This is critical!"

So he went to Mount Sinai, knowing that when God came down to Moses there was a wind, there was an earthquake, there was a fire. And when God told Elijah to go outside

the cave, all three of those things occurred. But God wasn't in any of them.

Then there was a still small voice.

So when we come to Hebrews 12 we see what God was teaching Elijah and what He is teaching us through him. We don't come to the mount that can be touched, or to the fire, or to the tempest, or to an audible voice. That's not the way God speaks to us under this covenant. But we have come to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, who speaks to us from heaven in the still small voice of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told us in John 14–16, right before His crucifixion, that this is exactly how He would speak to us. He got the disciples together and said, "Look, I know you're sad. But it's better for you that I go away because if I go away, the Holy Spirit will come. And when He comes, He's not just going to be with you, He's going to be in you. And when He's in you, He's going to lead and guide you into all the truth. He will take the things that belong to the Father and belong to Me, and

He'll reveal and transmit them to you. He won't speak on His own accord, but what He hears, that will He speak."

And friend, when God is going to lead you and me, it's going to be through the still small whisper of the Spirit in our heart.

Yet many people want more than that. Some people think, "I'm in a desperate situation. I need something more!" But think about that for a moment. What God is telling us through this story is that we are living under a new covenant in which we have God on the inside. If God is going to guide us, He's going to do it from within.

The greatest event that could happen to a human being is the new birth. And how does God let us know that we have experienced that new birth? Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

When we are born again, angels don't come and unroll scrolls and tell us that we're saved. Fire doesn't dance around our living rooms and God doesn't send an

earthquake or a mighty rushing wind to let you and me know that we're saved. He does, however, testify of our salvation through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Now if God lets us know that we're saved by the inward witness of the Spirit, the most important decision we'll ever make in our life, why should we look for some outward sign for other decisions we face in life?

Why should we look for some spectacular sign to tell us if we're supposed to move or take a certain job? I can hear the thoughts now: "Oh, God, I've got to make a decision! Should I move to this place? Should I take this job? I'm under pressure. I don't know what to do. God, God, You've got to show me! I need a sign! I need something big."

No, you don't! In fact, if you look for the spectacular, you're liable to miss the supernatural that is right in front of your nose all along.

A friend of mine had a girlfriend who went off to Europe and ended up not coming back. He was pretty upset about it, so he

went to Germany where she was staying to get her and bring her back.

Everything was set and she was packing up to leave when she walked by her laundry hamper, saw that it was open, and closed it. As soon as she closed it, it fell open again. She honestly believed that her hamper opening was a sign that she wasn't supposed to go back to the States with her boyfriend. So she told her boyfriend she wasn't going to return with him and sent him home.

You laugh, but Christians do that same kind of thing all the time.

When I was single, I tried to rent an apartment from a Christian woman who was a Spirit-filled, tongue-talking, church-going, Bible-toting believer. But she wouldn't rent the apartment to me. I found out why later. She said, "God, if I'm supposed to rent the apartment to Bayless, the telephone needs to ring so many times before two o'clock." And the phone didn't ring enough times before two o'clock so it obviously wasn't God's will

for her to rent the apartment to me. If I had known that, I would have called her myself!

Friend, that's not the way God guides us. We're not to be led that way. He leads us through His Word and through that inward witness of the Spirit—that still small voice.

Today you may be in a crisis. It's crunch time and you're wanting fire, you're wanting an earthquake, you're wanting a strong wind. God is not going to give you any of those. But what He will give you as one of His children is that still small whisper of the Spirit. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice . . . and they follow Me" (John 10:27). God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit who has taken up residence within us. You've just got to get quiet long enough to hear.

GOD'S UNEXPECTED REMEDY

Did you notice in 1 Kings 19 that three times God asked Elijah, "What are you doing here?" And his response was, "Well, they've torn down Your altars. Everyone's forsaken You. I'm the only one left, and they seek to take my life. They want to kill me, God!"

Elijah was absolutely obsessed with concern for his safety. That's all he was praying about. "God, they want to kill me. Jezebel, she threatened me, and they want to take my life, and I'm the only one who's serving You." He prayed that over and over and over. It's the only thing that came out of his mouth.

But notice that God didn't give Elijah the kind of answer that he probably wanted. What He did tell him was this: "You're not alone. I've got 7,000 others who haven't bowed the knee to Baal. So you're not by yourself."

I don't know the storm you may be in or the hard times you may be facing, but what I do know is that you are not by yourself. Not only is God by your side, other people are going through the same things you're going through.

Notice, too, that God doesn't address the second part of Elijah's concern—that his life is in danger. Elijah probably wanted to hear, "You know, I've got 7,000 who haven't bowed the knee to Baal, and I'm going to judge Ahab and Jezebel shortly, and all will see that you have served me in righteousness." But God doesn't even address the issue of Ahab and Jezebel and their intent to kill Elijah.

Instead God instructs Elijah to anoint several people, but God makes no mention of Jezebel and her threats.

Here's what you need to realize as you go through your storm. Don't be surprised if the direction God gives you in your crisis is a bit different than you expect.

When God speaks to you, He may not give you the answer you're looking for. It's more

likely that He will lead you to bless others and to minister to them rather than just make you cozy and comfortable, which is what He did to Elijah. You will find that when you water others, God will see that you're watered yourself. And as you obey God, He will deal with whatever opposition you face.

By the way, you should note that one of the guys that God told Elijah to anoint ended up being the one who called for the servants to throw Jezebel out the window. Elijah didn't know that at the time, but God had a plan to take care of Jezebel and make her pay for her sins. Now, I'm sure Elijah would like to have heard that right then, but God didn't tell him His plans. But through ministering and doing what he was supposed to be doing, Elijah was used by God to fulfill His plan. If he hadn't followed God's direction, Jehu never would have been there to tell the guys to throw Jezebel out the window.

God will certainly take care of you, but it's only as you get out and get busy doing what He tells you to do, even if you can't see whether it's connected or not.

So What Now?

As you go through your crisis, realize first of all that zero is not a bad place to be.

If you are relying completely on your own savvy and understanding of your situation, if you are relying on your own strength, make the decision right now (all it takes is a quick adjustment in your heart) to put your trust in God.

He has delivered, He does deliver, and He will deliver. Don't rely on your own strength. Anchor your trust in God. You may feel that you're spent, played out. It's time to look to God. When you come to the end of yourself, you find out God is more than enough.

Put your trust in God right now. Roll your burdens and your situation over on Him.

Then maybe there is some baggage in your life you need to let go of. Maybe you need to lighten the ship a little bit. Are there relationships in your life (and I'm not talking about your marriage) that you need to cut loose? If you've been hanging around with

fools or you have relationships in your life that are keeping you from reaching the will of God, that are hindering you from going where God wants you to go, maybe you need to lighten your ship.

And then, if you're sleep deprived and not taking care of your body, chances are, even if there is a very real problem and you're in the midst of a very real crisis, things are blown out of proportion. If you're exhausted, your problems will always seem bigger and worse than they actually are.

You need to make the determination to take care of your body—that temple that you live in. It is God's house. Your body is His property. You are a steward and you need to take care of it. If you haven't gotten proper rest, if you're not eating properly, or if you're not getting the exercise you should, make the determination that you are going to make a change. And do it!

From a spiritual standpoint, make sure you are feeding on the bread of life and getting yourself rehydrated through prayer.

WHERE IS GOD WHEN HARD TIMES HIT?

And then, finally, if you need direction, remember how God is going to lead you. What is that still small voice whispering to your heart? What has He already been saying to you? Take time to wait on Him and listen.

Where is God when hard times hit? He's indwelling you through the Holy Spirit, and He's ready and able to meet you in your moment of need. If you will take time to apply these timeless principles from God's Word, you will find with God there is no crisis, no problem, and no storm that you cannot face!

KEEP TRUSTING IN GOD!

God's promises are with you in the midst of your crisis. He is greater than whatever you're facing! With Him, you have everything you need to get up, press forward, and experience victory.

Do you want to know more of God's promises? Do you want to experience more victory in your life? Go to www.BaylessConley.tv.

On the website you'll discover more resources just like this one, as well as archived messages, email devotionals, broadcasts, and blog posts—all to help you trust in God!

Check it out today! ▶



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WHERE IS GOD WHEN HARD TIMES HIT?

Most people have asked, “Where is God when hard times hit?” Even great heroes of the Christian faith like Elijah, a prophet from the Old Testament.

Elijah’s life was going great. He experienced spiritual victory after spiritual victory and had the favor of God on his life. And that’s when it happened! That’s when the bottom fell out of his life. In the midst of his pain, Elijah wondered where God was. And in the midst of his pain, God answered.

Like Elijah, God has a word for you in the midst of your pain, suffering, and struggle. It’s a word that you can discover today!



Bayless is the founding pastor of Cottonwood Church in California. He is known for his clear presentation of the gospel and the way he applies the life-changing truth of God’s Word to everyday life. It’s this same truth that radically turned his life around many years ago.

Today, *Answers with Bayless Conley* is impacting lives around the world in many languages on TV and online.



Answers with Bayless Conley
PO Box 417
Los Alamitos, CA 90720
www.BaylessConley.tv



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