

Our Response in Hard Times – Step Out

James 5:17 – *“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.”* (New King James). *“Elijah was as completely human as we are”* (The Living Bible). Have you ever read the bible and it just doesn't make sense? When I read that Elijah was just like you and me, to be honest, it's hard to accept. When I look at my life and then at the stuff Elijah did I think – I am nothing like Elijah.

Elijah prayed, and a young boy who was dead came back to life! If I was like that the whole world would want to know me. **1 Kings 17:22** *“The Lord heard Elijah's prayer, and the life of the child returned, and he came back to life!”* On another occasion, Elijah prays that it will not rain, so it doesn't rain for over three years. Then Elijah prays again that it would rain and it rains! Next, Elijah challenges the political and religious powers of his day and says to them, *“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”* Such boldness would probably get you killed – but it didn't stop Elijah.

What else? Elijah challenges the 400 prophets of Baal to a simple game of, *“who can call down fire from heaven.”* Well, the prophets of Baal could not! But Elijah did! Elijah then kills the 400+ prophets of Baal.

Wow! And yet the Bible says that Elijah is a man with a nature just like ours! In spite of his greatness, Elijah was subject to the same frailties that we are.

Let's go to the complete other end of the spectrum... Lets talk about Gideon. Think about this: God goes to a man hiding in a wine press and calls him a mighty hero! **Judges 6:11, 12** – *“Gideon son of Joash had been threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!’”*

It's obvious; when God looks at you he sees something you don't see! Lets face it, if you were looking for someone to deliver a nation out of bondage and oppression, the person hiding in a wine press would be the last person you would choose. Think about it – if you were looking for political power you would look in the Houses of Parliament. If you were looking for financial power you would look in the City of London. It seems the last place you would look for someone who could deliver a nation would be in a wine press!

So it's clear – God does not look at (or for) the same things we look for. **Romans 4:17** *“...In the presence of Him whom he believed – God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.”* What does it mean, “To call those things which do not exist as though they did?” Quite simply, it means God could look at a man hiding in a wine press and call him a mighty hero!

Now, here we have seen two men, who it seems, couldn't be any more different...

Gideon hiding in a wine press – Elisha on spiritual steroids! I don't know about you but as I read through the things Elijah did there is nothing he did that sounds remotely like me. He called down fire from Heaven; he brought people back to life! Yet James must have known something about Elijah that caused him to think that you and me are a lot like him.

We read in **Kings** that a woman named Jezebel had threatened to kill Elijah. And in **1 Kings 19:2** it says, *“So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: ‘May the gods also kill me if by this time tomorrow I have failed to take your life like those whom you killed’.”* Who does this woman think she's talking to? This is Elijah! The man that raises the dead, and calls down fire! But let's examine Elijah's response in hard times...

1 Kings 19:3 states that Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. Suddenly *James 5:17* is starting to become a little more believable. Maybe Elijah was completely human as we are? Maybe Elijah is a lot like you and me? Maybe there are similarities after all?

But were there also similarities between Gideon and Elijah? And if so, how were they different? Well, the two men found themselves in a similar negative circumstance, however, they each started dealing with it from totally different perspectives:

1. On one side we have **Gideon** – a plain Jane kind of guy – a white bread only kind of guy – a vanilla ice cream kind of guy – who’s afraid of his own shadow. Gideon would never stand out in a crowd, because he was a ‘blend in’ kind of guy. I’m sure he never rocked the boat or challenged the status quo. There’s one word that fully describes this man – ‘ordinary’!
2. Next we have **Elijah**! Praying for the sick and raising the dead kind of guy. He prays that it will not rain and it does not rain – prays again that it would rain and it rains – he challenges the political and religious powers of his day. Saying to them, ***“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”*** Elijah challenges the 400 prophets of Baal to a game that only he could win! This man was an ‘up at your face’ kind of guy, and there’s only one word to describe him – ‘peculiar’!

Two totally different men had found themselves in the exact same circumstance of life. And they reacted the same way also. They both went into hiding! Gideon was hiding in a wine press and Elijah was hiding in a cave. Gideon was hiding in fear and intimidation, and Elijah had reached the place of suicidal prayers. **1 Kings 19:4, *Then he went on alone into the desert, travelling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.”*** (New Living Translation)

Again, Gideon was hiding in fear and intimidation, and Elijah had reached the place of suicidal prayers. BUT IN BOTH CASES GOD IGNORED THEIR PLACE OF HIDING AND POINTED THEM TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE! Remember **James 5:17**? Elijah was as entirely human as we are. He had the same human frailties that we have. When you examine the bible it becomes clear that our bible heroes were mere mortals. The only difference between them and others of their generation was their faith and God’s divine intervention!

Once again, the scriptures are very clear. We all have the ability to feel like we’ve got the world by the tail – and to go into hiding through fear and intimidation. The only difference is this. Today we don’t hide in wine presses and caves; we hide in places like alcohol – drugs – and gambling. We hide in places and things that steal our identity. We hide in places where we can escape the pressures of life – in the dark corridors of our minds!

1 Kings 19:9. *And there Elijah 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?”* I believe the Lord is asking some of you today *“What are you doing here?”* “What are you doing here?” – being a slave to fear and negative thoughts or emotions. “What are you doing here?” – Chasing carnal relationships that you

know are unhealthy. “What are you doing here?” – Spending money (you don’t have) trying to fill a hole in you that only God can fill.

There is a story about a tourist who sat down on a bench in a park. Looking over to an old man sitting next to him the tourist asked, “Can you tell me something this town is noted for?” The old man replied, “I don’t rightly know except that it’s the starting point to the future. You can start here and go anywhere you want!”

Gideon’s story starts with him hiding in a wine press and finishes as a great hero – the deliverer of a nation. With Elijah it looks like his story could end in a cave but after Elijah listens to the voice of the Lord, he not only comes out of his hiding place but becomes one of the greatest prophets in history!

Note, Gideon had to leave the wine press and Elijah had to leave the cave. Can I ask every one of you a question this evening?

- What does your wine press look like inside?
- What does your cave look like inside?

I believe that if you listen intently, (right now) God is speaking to you. And He is saying, “*Come out of the cave. Come out of your hiding place. Step out into My promises!*”