



# THRIVING IN THE OVERLOAD:

## Nine Lessons from the Prophet Elijah

By Dr. Kellye Schiffner Carver

In today's world, it's easy to become overwhelmed. We have marriages to strengthen, children to raise, friendships to nurture, ministries to build, homes to maintain, work to do. And what if there's a health emergency? Or a job loss? Or a financial crisis? We get stressed, anxious, even desperate.

In 1 Kings 19, the prophet Elijah flees for his life, even asking God for the release of death. But how Elijah handles this situation (and how God sees him through it) provides important lessons for us when we are overwhelmed.

**L**et's first consider the context: King Ahab (married to the wicked Canaanite Queen Jezebel) rules the northern kingdom of Israel in about 850 B.C. At Mount Carmel, Elijah showed the power of God to 450 prophets of Baal who were seized and killed. When King Ahab tells Jezebel about this, she threatens Elijah, who "ran for his life" (1 Kings 19:3).

### **Overload calls for our resolve, not our resignation.**

God didn't instruct Elijah to flee. Elijah probably hoped the miracle at Mount Carmel would restore the nation's faith in the Lord (1 Kings 18:37), but now it all feels pointless. In that moment of weakness, Elijah seems to forget Whom he serves. He loses sight of God's goodness and His power. Rather than losing faith in our work, our purpose, or in God Himself, resolve instead to ask for direction and trust in His plans.

**Difficulty is not punishment from God.** The prophet was going about his business, doing the Lord's work. He had done nothing wrong. But because of the queen's vengeance, he became a target. As Christians doing God's work, we may run into difficulty — from circumstances or from people — but we've been encouraged to persevere (John 16:33).

Elijah arrives at Beersheba — 75 miles from his home — finally out of the reach of King Ahab. He leaves his servant and journeys alone another 20 miles into the desert — the same desert the Israelites wandered for 40 years — where he prays. Elijah shares his desperation with the Lord, even asking to die.

### **We can and should bring our desperation to the Lord.**

He already knows our hearts, and He is not surprised or angered by our honesty. He wants us to come to Him in every circumstance (Jeremiah 29:12; Hebrews 4:16). Elijah went so far as to ask for death!

Over the next few verses, Elijah sleeps, interacts with *the* angel of the Lord, God the Son Himself, and eats and drinks.

**Overload calls for renewed self-care.** One of the best ways to combat overload is to ensure we meet basic needs. We can't function without adequate rest, nutritious food, or fresh water. Unfortunately, when we're stressed, our self-care (which also includes nurturing meaningful

relationships and engaging in enjoyable activities) is often first to go. This is the opposite of what should happen! How would Elijah have fared if he had continued traveling through the desert with no sleep, food, or water? It is the same for us in the deserts of life. And it's okay to accept help to meet these needs (especially if it's *the* angel of the Lord!).

**God works His ways in the difficulty.** We're on God's timing, not our own. Elijah just had a mountaintop experience (literally) on Mount Carmel. He reveled in God's triumph. Yet, just one chapter later, he's under a death threat. The seasons of life have many ups and downs, but God is present and working. Here, *the* angel of the Lord offers sustenance and guidance. Perhaps this is an unexpected answer to Elijah's prayer for release. How often do we pray for a particular outcome but become so intent on our own plan that we miss other ways God is intervening? Although Elijah asks to end his life, the Lord works to preserve it. And this isn't the first time God provides for Elijah (1 Kings 17:2–6 and 1 Kings 17:13–16). We don't know God's plans, but we do know that He weaves all things together for good (Romans 8:28).

Elijah stayed in the desert for 40 days and nights with no additional food, yet God sustained him. Sound familiar? Jesus fasted in the desert for 40 days and nights during his temptation (Matthew 4:2). Elijah then travels 200 more miles to Mount Horeb (also known as Mount Sinai). Centuries earlier, Moses received the Ten Commandments while on this mountain for 40 days (Exodus 24:18; Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9). But since this journey likely wouldn't have taken 40 days, some scholars believe Elijah took time for meditation and prayer while in the desert. After all, we do not live by bread alone but by the Word of God (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4).

Initially, Elijah focuses on himself. He wallows in everything going wrong, insists he's alone, and indicates his work is pointless (which, in classic human fashion, is probably an exaggeration). But God, in His mercy, encourages Elijah to go out and stand on the mountain to experience His presence. Elijah witnesses a wind, an earthquake, a fire, and a gentle whisper. We again see a parallel with Moses (a theme throughout Elijah's story): God appeared to Moses and the Israelites in this very desert through similar natural phenomena (Exodus 19:16–20; Exodus 34:5–8).

**Overload requires a focus on God, not ourselves.** God twice asks Elijah, "What are you doing here?" This may mean that Elijah was there of his own accord, not by God's directive. God already knew the situation, but gives Elijah two chances to respond, and both times, Elijah focuses on himself and on what's going wrong.

**God works in the big and the small things.** Although we might expect to see Him in powerful earthquakes or fires, He also uses small whispers. Sometimes we're so intent on looking for God in the big things that we miss Him in the small things, forgetting *the still small voice* (KJV) is the Word of God.

**God will always be our refuge and our deliverer.** Elijah is at the end of his rope, and the Lord knew it and met him there. God provides specific instructions for Elijah to anoint new kings of Aram and Israel. He also directs him to anoint a new prophet in his place. Elijah now has new rulers to protect him and a new prophet to carry out God's work. And because God will set aside an army of 7,000 loyal Israelite followers, we know that Elijah was, in fact, never actually alone in staying true to his faith. In his deepest hour of need, God came through for Elijah.

As you learn from Elijah's experience, ask yourself:

- 1—Am I resolute rather than resigned?
- 2—Am I persevering in God's work?
- 3—Am I being open and vulnerable before the Lord?
- 4—Am I taking care of myself as I deal with this situation?
- 5—Am I trusting God to work through this difficulty?
- 6—Am I refocusing on God, rather than on what's wrong?
- 7—Am I looking for God in the big and the small things?
- 8—Am I trusting God to deliver me?

**Even when we fall away from God, He doesn't fall away from us.** Elijah made mistakes as he tried to cope with difficulty. He focused on everything that was going wrong, he lost trust in God, and he didn't manage everything perfectly. But God met him where he was and saw him through the situation. May we never forget that God can and will do the same for us, my dear sisters in Christ. [\*Q\*](#)

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