

Praying like Elijah – God’s timing

When God seems “slow” in answering our prayers it can change us for better or worse.

How have you been impacted when God’s timing doesn’t match yours?

1 Kings 18:1-15

After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: ‘Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.’ 2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria, 3 and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, his palace administrator. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the Lord. 4 While Jezebel was killing off the Lord’s prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.) 5 Ahab had said to Obadiah, ‘Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals.’ 6 So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another. 7 As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognised him, bowed down to the ground, and said, ‘Is it really you, my lord Elijah?’

8 ‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘Go tell your master, “Elijah is here.”’

9 ‘What have I done wrong,’ asked Obadiah, ‘that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death? 10 As surely as the Lord your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you. 11 But now you tell me to go to my master and say, “Elijah is here.” 12 I don’t know where the Spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn’t find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshipped the Lord since my youth. 13 Haven’t you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the Lord? I hid a hundred of the Lord’s prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water. 14 And now you tell me to go to my master and say, “Elijah is here.” He will kill me!’

15 Elijah said, ‘As the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today.’

Introduction

- Three and a half years
- A long time of preparation before the show down
- God’s timing is perfect and his grace is sufficient
- Jesus spent three years in public ministry before his show down
- King David defended sheep from wild animals in the wilderness before Goliath
- Paul spent time 3 years in the Arabian Desert before going to Jerusalem. (Galatians 1:17)
- God is more concerned about what he is doing in you than through you
- Obadiah like Aaron to Moses is a sign of God’s faithfulness and support

What do you do while you're waiting?

Elijah spent time being hidden (by the brook Cherith) and then sharing in the helplessness of a destitute widow. (1 Kings 17) Through both experiences he learnt to depend daily on God for his next meal. This experience went on, "For a long time ..." (1 Kings 18:1) until after 3 years he was told by God to confront Ahab again.

Obadiah spent the same period of time serving in the courts of a corrupt king and seeking to protect and provide for 100 prophets who he was feeding and hiding from the murderous intentions of Jezebel. He too had to trust God on a daily basis.

While we are waiting we may need to learn daily dependence on God in our hidden and helpless situations. On the other hand, we may need to trust God daily in the midst of pressure to compromise while providing for others.

What does God do while you're waiting?

- **God shows patience and mercy**

2 Peter 3:8-9 reminds us that God is not slow about his promise as some people count slowness. His apparent delay can be an expression of his mercy in giving people time to turn to him so that they don't experience his judgement.

- **God battles on our behalf**

Daniel 10 reminds us that delayed answers to prayer can also be the result of an unseen spiritual battle. Daniel is told after 3 weeks of prayer and fasting that his prayers were heard from "the first day" (Daniel 10:12) but that spiritual resistance or battle in the heavenly realm delayed the delivery of the answer. (Compare Ephesians 6:10ff)

Conclusion

Waiting on God's timing is usually not easy. It tests our trust and patience. We may be called to live a hidden life or to trust others in the midst of our helplessness. We may also wait in places of privilege or pressure where others depend on us. Whatever our circumstances we need to learn to depend daily on God. We can also be assured that God is battling on our behalf and that he longs to show mercy to all people.

Questions

- When have you had to wait "a long time" for God? How did it impact you?
- What do you do while your waiting for God? What did Elijah and Obadiah do?
- Reflect on the relationship between Obadiah and Elijah. In what ways did they need each other? What challenges did this pose for each of them? Which do you identify with most? Why?
- What does this reading teach you about the character of God?
- How might you pray differently as a result of considering these readings?