

LIVING ON THE EDGE

A series on the
life of
Elijah

Group study guide

Part Four

13th October 2019



All of us have experienced the sensation of having a foreign object in our shoes, it is annoying, and we stop and remove it before it causes any damage, because if we leave it in there pretty soon we will be walking with a limp. The same is true spiritually speaking, except often we ignore the irritant and limp along the best we can. This study will look at some of the things which keep us "Limping along and how to remove them

In the fourth part of this series, Elijah has returned to Israel from hiding in Zarephath, and he has allowed himself to be found by King Ahab's steward Obaidiah, who sends Ahab to meet Elijah. Ahab greets Elijah as the "troubler of Israel," and Elijah retorts it is not him but Ahab who is troubling Israel. How will this stalemate be resolved?

Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word.

22 Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men.

23 Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it.

24 And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken."

25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it."

26 And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made.

27 And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."

1 28 And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them.

29 And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

(1 Kings 18:19-29 ESV)

Commentary

This contest takes place on Mt Carmel, which is actually a range of mountains rather than a single peak. Most likely the contest took place at the bottom rather than the top, as summit was considered holy ground which was off limits to anyone but the priests.

Fire is seen as an indication of the presence of God, (think of the burning bush with Moses), so by asking for fire, Elijah and the prophets of Baal are asking their respective gods to make themselves known with an appearance.

As we know here in Central Oregon, fire is connected with lightning, and as Baal was considered the storm god, then if he is truly a god, directing a bolt of lightning to light the sacrifice should be no problem.

Fire also represents the acceptance of the sacrifice, that by sending fire down from heaven the deity would show his approval of what had been offered.

The term “limping along” is used in two different ways. The Hebrew word can be used to refer to the bough of a tree, thus tree limbs which have been cut down and used as crutches to help support a person walking. As the person “hobbles” along, they sway from side to side, and likewise the people are swaying from side to side; one minute worship Yahweh and then the next moment Baal.

Lastly the prophets of Baal have Jezebel as their patron, not Ahab, he is as uncommitted as his people, except for the pressure and influence exerted on him by his wife.



Group Study

Start this week's group by reviewing your responses to last week's study, how you applied them during the week, what you discovered as you applied them. What were the successes and difficulties, and where adjustments will you need to make?

Have you ever got into a contest with someone trying to prove your worldview is true and their isn't?

What kind of proof would they need convincing of before accepting your worldview and viceversa?

Can you categorically prove to someone God is God?

If you were to arrange a competition to prove the reality of God what would you ask God to do?

Elijah was outnumbered by the prophets of Baal 450:1, and yet he was so confident of winning that he was quite willing to let them go first. Are you confident enough in God, to let someone have their say before you have yours?

Elijah asks the people how long they will go "limping along?" In other words these people are supposed to be following God whole heartedly and yet are choosing to waver back and forth between relying on God and Baal. They can't decide who to follow! Why do you think people have such a hard time making a choice of who to follow?

We live in a society full of choices, how do you think our consumeristic attitude affects how we walk in the way of the Gospel?

Trevin Wax in his book the “Counterfeit Gospel” lists the following ways we try to impinge our choices on the Gospel. Discuss.

Therapeutic Gospel: Sin robs us of our sense of fullness. Christ’s death proves our worth as humans and gives us power to reach our potential. The church helps us find happiness.

Formalist Gospel: Sin is failing to keep church rules and regulations. Christ’s death gives me an agenda, so I can begin to follow the prescribed forms of Christianity.

Moralist Gospel: Our big problem is sins (plural) and not sin (nature). The purpose for Christ’s death is to give us a second chance and make us better people. Redemption comes through the exercise of willpower with God’s help.

Judgmentless Gospel: God’s forgiveness does not need to come through the sacrifice of His Son. Judgment is more about God’s goodness, not the need for human rebellion to be punished. Evangelism is not urgent.

Social-Club Gospel: Salvation is all about finding fellowship and friendship at church. The gospel is reduced to Christian relationships that help us enjoy life.

Activist Gospel: The kingdom is advanced through our efforts to build a just society. The gospel’s power is demonstrated through cultural transformation, and the church is united around political causes and social projects.

Churchless Gospel: The focus of salvation is primarily on the individual, in a way that makes the community of faith peripheral to God's purposes. The church is viewed as an option to personal spirituality, or even an obstacle to Christlikeness.

Mystic Gospel: Salvation comes through an emotional experience with God. The church is there to help me feel close to God by helping me along in my pursuit of mystical union.

Quietist Gospel: Salvation is about spiritual things, not secular matters. Christianity is only about individual life change and is not concerned with society and politics.

How do these "gospels" reflect our choices rather than God's? Notice all these "gospels" are centred partly on truth, and yet they don't reflect the whole truth. If you were to walk in one of these ways how much of a spiritual "limp" would you develop?

Personal study

Take Some time this week and read the following passages and reflect on how these people "limped" in their walk with the Lord.

Limping from holding onto the past

As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.”

16 But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.

17 And as they brought them out, one said, “Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.”

18 And Lot said to them, “Oh, no, my lords.

19 Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die.

20 Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there-- is it not a little one?-- and my life will be saved!”

21 He said to him, “Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken.

22 Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there.” Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

23 The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

24 Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven.

25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

26 But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

(Genesis. 19:15-27 ESV)

Reflection

Do I have anything in my past I am lingering over and am reluctant to let go of despite the Lord's urging to do so? _____

Limping from holding onto the present

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"

20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."

21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

(Mark. 10:17-22 ESV)

Reflection

Do I have anything in my present I am trying to drag along that Jesus says let go of? _____

Limping from not staying focused on the future

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,

4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.

6 But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

9 But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’

10 And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage

feast, and the door was shut.

11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.'

12 But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

(Matthew. 25:1-13 ESV)

Reflection

Does my future destination keep me striding forwards?

REAP Method of studying Scripture

READ

Find the passages for today's reading in the Bible Reading Plan. Read the passages with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction, and correction (2 Timothy 3:16). Underline the verses that seem important and that God is using to speak to you.

EXAMINE

Spend some time reflecting and writing about what you've read. Write down one or two of the key verses that

stuck out to you. Ask yourself these questions and write down your thoughts:

- * What is going on in the passage?
- * Who is writing and whom is he writing to?
- * When was the author writing?
- * What are the circumstances that the author is addressing?

ing?

* Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?

* How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?

APPLY

After examining the passage, apply the text to your own life. Ask yourself these questions:

- * What is God's word for me from this passage?
- * How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?

* What are the things in my life that need to change in light of this truth?

PRAY

Pray through the passage and your application, asking God to change your heart and to change your life, based on the time you've spent in God's Word.