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Series: Expectant
1 Kings 16:29-17:24

**BIG IDEA – SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND TRUSTING IN GOD’S
PROVIDENCE**

I am so excited. I love our church so much. I really do. I cannot stand it sometimes, just all of the things that are happening. Guys, if you're new, I want to let you know that we are in our Multiply Initiative, and we're over halfway through. In September of 2024, I got up here, and we launched the Multiply Initiative. We basically said as a church, we're going to multiply disciples, leaders, groups, and churches.

But what we were even more excited about were all of the different ways you guys were going to multiply. You heard some of those in the video. Here's what I want to say. If you're new, I want you to get in, and I want you to multiply over the next seven months. I mean, how different could your life be in seven months than it is right now?

One of my buddies' football coach used to always say to him, "If you keep on doing what you've been doing, you're going to keep on getting what you've been getting." If you want something different, you're going to have to do something different. Your life could be so different in seven months. I want you to connect with what we're doing here.

Secondly, I want to tell you, the biggest picture of multiplication in our church is the number of kids who are being born. That's why we're having Parent Commissioning in two weeks. We have 60 families that have newborn babies or kids under 1 or 2 years old that are going to be dedicating them.

If you've had a baby, I want you to dedicate your kid this Parent Commissioning & Child Dedication Sunday. Listen. It's more for the parents than it is for the kids. They're not going to even remember it, but *you're* going to remember it. It's going to

be like a marker, a line in the sand, where you go, "These kids are the biggest and best gift from the Lord. We are the primary disciplers of our kids, and this is our church family." So, that's what we're going to do.

By the way, if you sign up, on Saturday we do this really great thing where we'll be in here, and I'm going to... Not that I know that much, but I'm going to be teaching on, basically, the principles and lessons I've learned being a parent (Margy and me) for the last 13 years. So I hope you can make that.

Also, when you got in... Look here. Grab this. If you're like, "What *is* this?" this is what's called a *bookmark*. We used to have these things. There used to be Borders and Barnes & Noble and bookstores. Raise your hand if you have a real Bible. All right. This goes in there. If you're modern, just take a picture of it, and then you'll have it on your phone all the time.

Here's what this is. We want to help you guys go deeper into God's Word. I want you to be a self-feeder. It is one of the great honors and privileges of my life to get up here and teach the Bible week in and week out, but I want you to be a self-feeder of God's Word. *SOAP* is an acronym: *Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer*. We want you to go to *the* Word every day to get *a* word from God. A lot of us don't know 1 and 2 Kings that well. This is going to help you dive deeper.

Finally, one of the things we're going to be talking about in this series is prayer. We're going to see it with Elijah and Elisha. So we thought, "Why wouldn't we end this series (when this is over in six weeks) with a prayer night the Monday after?" So, I want you to be there on July 14 at 6:30.

Here's what's unique. It's going to be like a lot of prayer nights where Donovan and his team will be leading us, but we're designing it so that you're actually going to be able to hear from people in our church about what God is doing in and through our church, and then we're going to be able to pray for that. So, that's going to be special. With that said, we have a lot of work to do this morning. Let's be expectant that God is going to work, even as we start a series called *Expectant*. Let's pray.

Lord, we are so expectant that you're going to do something. Would you give us that spirit of expectation? God, you are alive and well. You are on the move, and everything you did in the book of Acts you're still doing through the church today. Would you just make us a more prayerful and more faith-filled church? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right. Find 1 Kings 16. If you have a real Bible, it might take you a few minutes to find that. I'll meet you there in a few minutes. Here's the thing about books of the Bible. There are books in the Bible that we know really, really well. You might say,

"Oh, I know the gospel of John" or "I know Jonah" or maybe "I know Genesis." I mean, that's about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

There are books of the Bible we probably don't know well at all. Right? We went through Habakkuk together as a church, but you can think of Micah and Amos. If someone is like, "What's Amos about?" you're like, "Ask somebody else." That's what you normally say.

Then there are books that are kind of in the middle. We know a little bit about them. That's 1 Kings. That's 2 Kings. In fact, all of the "firsts" and "seconds" in your Old Testament...1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles...all tell you the history of Israel. Let me just summarize all of the books. Here's the history of Israel in one word: *horrible*.

Okay, let me explain what happened, and then I'm going to get to 1 Kings 16. There's a lot, and I'm going to kind of summarize the history of Israel in just a few sentences. Here's what happens. You have three kings at first that define the life of Israel: Saul, David, and Solomon. That's about 100 years.

For those 100 years... I mean, Saul is good, and then he goes bad, but then you have King David, and he fights all of these wars. Then you have peace and prosperity under Solomon. So, for 100 years, things are going basically pretty well. Then Solomon dies. There's a civil war. The kingdom divides. This is why, if you're just reading your Bible, doing your "through the Bible in a year," you're really confused.

You're like, "I just don't get it. There's Israel, and then there's Judah. Why are they different?" There are separate kingdoms now. Just follow me. There's Israel up north, and there's Judah down south. Judah is always doing better than Israel because it's always better in the South. Don't we know that here? And I'm from the North. It's better in the South, I promise you.

So, up in Israel, here's what's going on. Almost every king is horrible all the time. You can't even believe this. Israel is going to have 19 bad kings in a row. It's 200 years of bad kings. Judah is a little bit more of a mixed bag, and we'll get there in a second. We're going to meet Elijah in chapter 17, but before we can see how awesome he is and how unique he is in all that he does, we need to see how terrible of a situation Israel was in.

That's why we're in 1 Kings, chapter 16. ***"In the thirty-eighth year of Asa..."*** Now, if you write in your Bible (it's okay to write in your Bible), you can write "good king." He's a good king. He is the great-grandson of Solomon. That kind of tells you the time period we're in: a couple of generations after Solomon. Things have gotten really bad. ***"...king of Judah, Ahab..."*** It's confusing. They both have a lot of A's in their name.

He's a bad king. We're going to see in a minute he is the worst king Israel ever had. That's what it says. I'll show you this.

"...Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel..." There's the divided kingdom. **"...and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years."** Here we get a description of him. **"And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD..."** We shouldn't be that surprised. It's sad, but all of the kings basically did evil.

Here's what we're told next: **"...more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat..."** He was a horrible king. So, he's like, "If you thought Jeroboam was bad, it was easy for Ahab to be as bad as Jeroboam."

We need to be sophisticated when we understand sin and sinners. Not all sin is the exact same. It's the same in that God will punish it, yes. It's the same in that it's against God, but there are different levels and layers of sin, because certain sin more quickly destroys the sinner and more clearly dishonors God.

So, here's what we're told at the very beginning: Ahab is a massive sinner. But we're not done. We have to meet somebody else. We have to meet his wife. **"...he took for his wife Jezebel..."** Ever heard of her? Oh yeah. She shows up again in the book of Revelation, because she's a real person, and then she's a spirit.

Here's what basically happens. Ahab is a beta male. Do you know what a beta male is? Google that sometime. He's a beta male, which means he's passive. Passive men tend to marry controlling women. Have you ever met this marriage? There are a lot of these marriages...passive men, controlling women. That's *this* marriage. In fact, Jezebel is really in control. We'll see her next week and the week after, and she has a terrible influence. Ahab actually seems to be better when he's without her.

Anyway, let me show you where she's from. It says, **"...the daughter of Ethbaal..."** Notice the word *baal* is in there. **"...king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him."** God had a short list of things he told the kings not to do. It's not that long of a list, but one of them was "Do not marry women from other nations who worship different gods." God isn't against interracial marriage; he's against interreligious marriage.

If you ever wonder, "Why does Kyle always tell us not to date non-Christians?" this is why. Everybody always thinks, "I'm going to do missionary dating." I've told you before missionary dating leads to miserable marriages, because what happens is the non-Christian ends up having a way bigger influence on *you* than you end up having on *them* in most situations.

So, this is a horrible marriage. It's dysfunctional. It's diplomatic. It's political. It was trying to bring two nations together, but it made everything worse. So, that's what's happening to begin with. Look at what it says next. Now back to Ahab. **"He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria."** That was the capital city for Israel. **"And Ahab made an Asherah."**

Okay. I know it's a lot of background, but we need to talk about it. Ahab brings Israel into its past in the worst sense of the word. They are regressing, and they are becoming polytheistic again. It's like, "What? There is one God. I mean, that's the Shema. That's Deuteronomy 6." Anyway, they have all of these gods, and this is now state-sponsored idolatry.

Now, here's what's really interesting. Follow this. Baal and Asherah are different gods, but they have something in common. They were the two gods of fertility. Baal was the god of fertility when it comes to crops growing and rain falling. In the short, basically, Baal is the god of rain. That'll be important in a minute when it doesn't rain for three years.

Asherah is the god of human fertility. That's why often they'll talk about Asherah poles, which were very sexual in nature. So it's interesting. This is government-sponsored worship of sex. The Bible is not what happened; it's what happens. God doesn't like other people getting credit for what he has done. They're trying to explain the world apart from God.

This is what we do with science today. We're not anti-science, but you can't understand everything about the world through a telescope or a microscope. So, the first thing Elijah is going to have to do... He has a priority list. It's like, "There are a couple of things I have to deal with, but the first thing I have to deal with is this polytheistic idolatry." We'll get there.

Look at what happens next. Back to Ahab. **"Ahab did more..."** We're told twice he's the worst. Like, if you didn't get it, he's the worst of the worst of the worst. **"Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him."** This is a reminder that when we break God's law, we break God's heart. All sin is against God himself. Even if you think, "I'm doing it all by myself, and no one is involved but me," it's still against God.

So, we're given this. Then look here. This is the very end before we get to chapter 17 when Elijah comes on the scene. **"In his days [the days of Ahab] Hiel of Bethel..."** We don't know who that is, but he's somebody who was influenced by the idolatry of Ahab. **"...built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn..."** So, he built a city, and his son died. **"...and set up its gates at the cost of his**

youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun."

There are a lot of questions. Really quickly, here's the big idea: this guy pursued idolatry, and it cost him his kids. We don't know if this is child sacrifice. We don't know if this is just tragic things that happened because he was pursuing his idolatry. Sometimes we read about child sacrifice, and we go, "Those people way back then... Weren't they so archaic?"

Today, Americans still practice child sacrifice as they pursue the idols of their life. This could be work. Men will sacrifice. This could be "I don't want to have a kid right now, so the child will die so I can live." This is the guy who has to fulfill his passions and his hedonistic desires, and he leaves his kids to marry a lady half his age. I mean, we've all seen this.

So it's horrible. It's not fun to preach on this stuff, because it's like, "Okay. Part 1: it is just so bad you can't..." By the way, it's very bad because there's no one to stand up against it...until chapter 17. Let's go here. ***"Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.'"***

Elijah is so awesome, but we know nothing about him. We're going to know more about him, but when he comes on the scene, there is no birth narrative. That's unique. There is no, like, "He was disciplined by this prophet." We don't even know where Tishbe is. To this day, no one knows.

It was so far out that one commentator said he lived so out in the woods he had to walk into town to go hunting. That's how far away he lived. This is how God often works. He brings these people. Now, this is what's important. Elijah becomes the great prophet of the Old Testament. Though there are many prophets, he's in his own category. That's why when Jesus comes, they say, "Is he Elijah?"

This is why when Jesus takes his DNA Group up... Remember this? Peter, James, and John. He takes his DNA Group up on the mountain to the Mount of Transfiguration, and it says two people appear with him, Moses and Elijah, because in the mind of the Bible, Moses represents the Law, and Elijah represents all of the Prophets. So, what I want to do for the rest of our time is I want us to learn some principles from the life of Elijah.

Now, the temptation for you and me is to read the life of Elijah and be like, "He's way too unique. He's way too different than me. He's in a special class of his own," which is why, really quickly, I want to read you James 5. ***"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and***

six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit."

I want to talk about a couple of principles from the life of Elijah since we're told there he has a nature like us. Here's the first principle: if you're going to be used by God like Elijah was, you have to *publicly identify with Jesus Christ*. Elijah's name literally means "My God is Yahweh."

Let me speak to college students. I did college ministry for 10 years. Here's the key to going on a college campus. Everyone is like, "Here's what you need to do. You need to get involved in a church. You need to get involved in a Community Group. You need to find Christian friends." That's all good.

They'll normally tell you (I've given this speech), "Oh, you've got six weeks. In six weeks, then the cement hardens and you have to make all of your decisions." I believe in all that. Here's what I would say to a freshman going to college: "In the first 24 hours that you are on that campus, you need to identify as a strong follower of Jesus Christ in front of other people."

It doesn't mean you have to walk into your dorm like, "As the Lord liveth!" Could you imagine? "Who's the new guy from Winston-Salem?" Listen. The reason it's hard for you to share the gospel with your neighbors is they don't even know you're Christian. What happens is when you identify with Jesus Christ... It's easy if you do it early, and two things happen: your witness will increase and your temptation will decrease, because you've just taken a stand.

Here's the pattern: there is power in one person. Think about it. If you don't know this, groups don't lead. I've been in leadership most of my life. Groups don't lead. It's impossible. Groups govern. Groups are great at governing things. Groups are great to lead. It's great to lead a group of people. Groups don't lead. Individuals lead.

Just walk your mind through the Bible. You're like, "Oh yeah, Noah. Oh yeah, Abraham. Oh yeah, Moses. Oh yeah, David. Oh yeah, Jonah. Esther." This is the story. God raises up people. And here are the stages. We're going to see this today. I want you to see these stages. These are the four stages to being used by God.

Stage 1: you *stand out*. If you're going to make a difference, you have to be different. One of the reasons the American church has so little power is we're worldly. First Peter says people should ask us about the hope we have. When was the last time somebody asked you about the hope you have? If it has been awhile, it's probably because you're hoping in the same things *they* are, so there's nothing different about your life that would make them ask.

So, the first thing is you have to go, "I am going to stand out. People are going to know I'm a Christian." For some of you, you have not taken that step. At work, there are two people who know you're a Christian: you and Jesus. And Jesus isn't sure. (I'm just kidding.)

The second one is you *stand up*. I'm telling you, this is the pattern of Daniel. You stand out and you stand up. Standing up just says, "You know what? When the time comes, I tell people what I believe. I'm not a secret Christian. I'm not hoping nobody asks me about heaven, hell, the Bible, or sexuality. I'm not in people's faces about it, but I'm going to stand up for what I believe."

So, he does that. Now, the rest of the story, he's going to have to do two other things. These are hard. *Stand against*. You will not stand against if you have not stood out and stood up. The chance of you standing against is zero. You have to stand against. That's like, "Okay, now the moment came, and it's like, 'I don't believe that.' I'm not going to the goofy DEI thing in my human resources department. I don't believe this stuff. I feel weak when I sit under it. I'm not doing this."

You're not going to stand against if you haven't first stood up and stood out. Listen. Martin Luther, one of my heroes... This is not a history lesson, but Martin Luther did not want to destroy the Catholic church. He loved the Catholic church. He thought the Catholic church had become corrupt, so he wrote these books, and then they took him and all of his books. It's hard to explain.

Imagine going to the highest court of the day. They took all of his books and said, "Luther, we have two questions for you: Are these your books, and do you recant what they say?" This is a true story. He goes, "They *are* my books. Can I have 24 hours to get back to you on the second question?" He comes back the next day after praying, and he goes, basically, "I can't go against my conscience and the Word of God. I don't recant what I wrote in these books."

They call him an *outcast*, which meant anybody could kill him and it not be counted against them. So, his rich friend fake kidnaps him. Thank God for rich friends. Right? They take him to a castle. This is better than any Netflix show you've ever seen. This is true. He grows a beard and goes by the name Knight George and translates the New Testament into German so the common people could read it. Luther had to stand out and stand up, and when he was ready, God gave him the grace to stand against.

Then, here's the final pattern of it: you *stand alone*. Sometimes you're like, "I stood against, and I'm the only one who did this. Does nobody else believe this stuff?" Everyone will feel this at some point in life. "Am I the only believer in my family? Am I the only believer in my whole dorm?" In fact, God is going to call him from... Watch this. He calls him from public life to private life back to public life to private life.

Basically, do you want to confront King Ahab? You probably don't. *I don't want to do that. But after you do that, you need some time away. So, let me show you what happens here. Let me go back to what he says to him. "Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.'"*

Okay, a couple of last things on this. I want you to understand that in the Old Testament, God set up a checks and balances system. If you've ever been like, "How did we get the American form of government?" it's basically a Judeo-Christian worldview. What's underneath the way we set up our government? The doctrine of sin.

The reason the United States government is set up the way it is is because the founders had a deep view of the sinfulness of man, so they separated powers. That's why we have three branches of government. God did that in the Old Testament. There was the king, there was the prophet, and there was the priest.

The king was supposed to lead the nation politically. They were under a theocracy. It's different today. The priests were to lead the individual people spiritually, and here's what's really interesting. If you read the Bible, there are a lot of priests, and there are a lot of kings, but there are very few prophets. The role of the prophet was to correct the priest or the king when he did something wrong.

So, when a prophet shows up, everyone is like, "Oh no," because, basically, that's what it means. If a prophet shows up, it's like, "Something went horribly wrong." So, he comes. By the way, I'll just say this now because I don't know when I'm going to need to say it. I write my sermons one week at a time. I don't know what I'm going to need to say later. I want you to see, as well, this is a confrontation between God and government again.

You can't read the Bible without seeing godly men confront bad governmental leaders. So, if I ever have to do that, I don't want you to be like, "Kyle is being political." No, Kyle is being biblical, because this is just what you have to do occasionally. Some people think the Elijah/Elisha story is the Moses/Joshua story relived and it needs to happen in every generation. Ahab is the new Pharaoh; Elijah is the new Moses having to confront it again.

Now, remember what he said. It takes so much guts to go up to the king and go, "It ain't raining." Now, for us, we'd be like, "Praise the Lord. I don't like it when it rains." We are so modern. Modern people are the only people in the history of the world who don't want it to rain. We're like, "I don't want it to rain; my kids can't play soccer. I don't want it to rain; I can't play pickleball." That is so new.

Basically, for all of human history, people prayed that it would rain and rejoiced every time it rained, because rain was essential to the agrarian society. Here's what it would be like today. It would be like if some prophet went up to President Trump and said, "Because of what's going on in this nation, there will be no electricity for three years." That's what it would feel like.

"Because of that, there's no more oil and gas. Good luck for three years." That's what it feels like. What you just felt right there is what it feels like to be told, "It's not going to rain for three years." Now, this was an attack on the god Baal who was supposed to be the god of rain.

So, the first thing we need to do is stand out, stand up, stand against, and stand alone. Watch what happens next. Verse 2: ***"And the word of the LORD came to him: 'Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.'"*** I told you he's going to call him to separation for the purpose of preparation. He's going from public to private in just a moment.

The first big principle is if God is going to use us, we have to publicly identify with him, and that'll lead to standing out, standing up, and standing against. Here's the second big principle: we have to learn to *trust God to provide*. The rest of this story, for the most part, is Elijah learning to trust God to be provided for. This is something we're all going to need to learn.

I don't like when pastors make themselves the heroes of their own stories, but just for a moment, I want to tell you about one of the times I had to learn to trust God. I grew up in a family. My dad is in business, wealth management. I came to Christ, and I went to my parents and told them I wanted to be in full-time ministry. Let's just say they weren't super excited. (They love me now, and they're excited, and all that.)

So, I told my parents, "I'm going into full-time ministry." They were not super excited about that part, and the second part they were *really* not excited about, which was, "And I'm going to be raising support." They didn't even know what that was. They were like, "How does that work?" I was like, "That's when I go to your friends and ask them for money." They really weren't excited about *that* part.

Let me tell you this. In all seriousness, I had to raise my own financial support for five years, and it was such a moment of trusting God to provide for me. When Margy and I decided to plant this church, we had two kids, ages 4 and 2, and one kid on the way. We were like, "Wait a second. Are we planting this church with two believers and three unbelievers?" Our kids were so young, it was like, "We have three unbelievers and two of us. This is it."

You know, someone comes here now... "Oh, this is nice. Where did this building come from?" There was none of this here. They held an interest meeting at The Summit. I can still remember. It was like, "Who's going to show up at this interest meeting for a guy they've never even heard of? Who's going to move to Winston-Salem from Raleigh?" I didn't know if 10 people were going to show up there or 100 people.

Anyway, I double-dog dare you to trust God. That's what I'm trying to say. You need to flex the trust muscle. It doesn't get easier to trust God if you haven't trusted him in the past. Everybody thinks, "Oh, I'll trust God later." You have to learn to trust God right now.

So, here's what he says. He tells him to go to this place. He says, "Here's how I'm going to provide for you, great prophet." ***"You shall drink from the brook..."*** It's like, "Could I at least get a river?" "No. You don't get a river. You don't get an ocean. You don't get a lake. You get a little brook." ***"...and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."***

God will provide for you naturally and supernaturally. *Naturally* is a brook. Everyone is like, "Okay, I know that's where you get water." *Supernaturally* is ravens bringing you meat and bread. I'm sorry, you vegetarian, gluten-free people. That's what God brought. He's going to provide for Elijah, and he does it through supernatural ways and natural ways.

Here's the thing. The ravens are very interesting. It says the ravens brought him food. Let me read it to you. Verse 5: ***"So he went and did according to the word of the LORD."*** The amazing thing about Elijah is not just that he obeys but that he obeys right away. As you probably teach your kids, delayed obedience is disobedience, and the most time wasted is the time getting started.

It says, ***"He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook."*** So, here's what I want you to see: *God meets our needs, not our greed.* It's some humble provision, but it's provision.

God meets our needs daily. Why doesn't he just bring him a bunch of bread and meat? And why not at least bring it all in the morning? Why bring it in the morning and then bring it again in the evening? Is he trying to teach Elijah intermittent fasting? No. He's trying to say, "You have to trust me daily."

Here's the other thing. Now, this doesn't seem interesting to us, but ravens were unclean animals. In other words, God may provide for you in ways you're not expecting, or to say it more directly, don't tell God how he can and cannot provide for

you. He provides for Nehemiah to rebuild the wall through an ungodly king. Who knows?

Or Charles Spurgeon. Charles Spurgeon was considered the prince of preachers. He preached in the 1800s, had the first megachurch in the world, was in London. Anyway, whenever I read his sermons before I preach, they always discourage me because they're so amazing. I was reading a sermon on this, and he says if God can use the ravens to provide for God's people, maybe he could even use you.

Don't say, "God couldn't use me." God uses a raven to provide daily for Elijah. Here's what's interesting. Here's what happens in Elijah's life. He steps out and obeys God. We call that *adventure*. Take God at his word. Take your next step. Then he meets the providence of God in his life. It's like, "Oh, I went there, and there it was."

By the way, the word *Cherith* means to cut down. Some say maybe he needed to go to this place to be humbled a little bit. He just became unbelievably famous or infamous, you might say, at the same time. He just confronted the king, and now he needs to go to the brook.

Verse 7 is confusing. Like I always tell you, a good Bible reader is a confused Bible reader. Look at this. ***"And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land."*** Okay. Think about this for a second. Why did the brook dry up? Well, we were told that. Right? Because there was no rain.

Okay, then ask *this* question: Why was there no rain? Because Elijah was praying that it would not rain. Elijah obeys God, and the brook dries up. Sometimes what you're praying for will bring pain into your life. How many of us want to pray for things, but we want to pray for things in such a way that they happen but it's not painful for us?

You know, "Lord, get me out of this addiction, but not in a way that's painful." Good luck. "Lord, raise my kids to be godly, selfless kids who are just going to be witnesses for Christ." Then we're worried if anything terrible happens to them. I mean, not too terrible. We worry if someone makes fun of them. They're going to have pain in their life.

So, the brook dries up. Here's what happens in your life. Some of you right now, the brook is drying up or has dried up. There are many brooks. There's the brook of health. It dries up. We call that *getting older*. There's a brook of relationships that sometimes dry up. There's the brook of influence or popularity. There's the brook of enjoying what you're doing at work.

So, why does the brook dry up? Again, you have to be led by the Holy Spirit in your own life, but at least in Elijah's life, the brook dries up because it's time for him to go

somewhere else. And here's the truth: he wouldn't leave the brook if it didn't dry up. You've heard this saying. Right? "People don't change until it becomes too painful to stay the same."

The guy has needed to lose 75 pounds forever, and then he goes to his doctor, and his doctor says, "You're pre-diabetic." All of a sudden he loses weight because he had the wake-up call of "Wait a second. It's going to be more painful to stay the same than to lose weight, as painful as losing weight will be."

I want you to see what happens next. In verse 8, God calls him to a new assignment. **"Then the word of the LORD came to him..."** You'll see this paradigm. "All right. Time for you to go somewhere else." **"Arise, go to Zarephath..."** That's basically the area where Jezebel is from. **"...which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you."**

You don't get your next assignment until you've completed your current one. Life is a bunch of assignments, a bunch of different ministries. You know, it's interesting. Growing up... I was only in student ministry for two years, but my student minister used to say, "Life is temporary, life is a trust, and life is a test."

Basically, Elijah (you'll see this in a few minutes) has a bunch of tests he has to pass. Pastor Dave told me... He grew up in a very godly family with a very godly mother and father. He has a very good relationship with his mom. He has told me before when he was in middle school or high school, maybe even when he was in college, if he was going through something, he'd talk to his mom about it.

He'd say, "This has happened" or "This is difficult," and he said his mom would always say the same thing to him. "David, pass the test." I wonder if there's something that some of you are going through right now and the word is, "Pass the test." When you pass the test, you'll get your next assignment.

So, he has to go now to Zarephath. By the way, each one of these assignments gets increasingly more difficult, so he has to learn how to trust God at a new level. All this is going to lead to chapter 18 where he has to confront 400 prophets. Well, you have to go through some stuff to get ready for that.

So, he goes to Zarephath, which is 100 miles away. In good terrain you could go about 20 miles a day. This is a five-day journey. It's far away. He's going to go there. Let's see what happens. **"So he arose and went to Zarephath."** Again, immediate obedience. **"And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks."** The adventure of his life meets the providence of God. There she is.

"And he called to her and said, 'Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.' And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, 'Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' And she said, 'As the LORD your God lives...'" By the way, notice she doesn't say "My God"; she says, "Your God."

"...I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." This was not something Elijah was expecting. He's like, "God, could you have sent me to the wealthy widow? I got the poor widow."

"And Elijah said to her, 'Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son.'" In this story, God brings together somebody who has a physical need and somebody who has a spiritual need.

Well, they all have a physical need to some extent, but in this situation, Elijah has this physical need. The widow is not yet a believer. She has a spiritual need. By the way, God often will bring people into your life who are meeting a physical need of yours so you can meet a spiritual need of theirs.

Your waiter is meeting a physical need of yours; you can meet a spiritual need of theirs maybe. Your financial adviser... If you started going, "The people who are meeting some of the needs in my life... I wonder if God would open up a door for me to meet the spiritual needs in *their* life." That's what's happening with Elijah. Verses 14-16 are the loaves and fishes story of the Old Testament.

"For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'" And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah."

I wish I could just go, "And that's the end of the story. Let's pray." But if you know this story, it gets really bad. Sometimes this is what happens. Life is going well. God answers one prayer. Something happens and something horrible happens. I wish the story just ended right here, but I have to show you what happens next. The final test for Elijah.

Verse 17: ***"After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him."*** Now, every parent knows this. The greatest fear any and every parent has is that their child

would die. We have people in this church who have had to walk through that. Every parent says, "I want my kids to bury me. I don't want to bury my kids."

In *this* situation, it's a very, very sad story. It's always a sad story, but she's also a widow. I told you this before, but they say if you lose your parents, you lose your past; if you lose your spouse, you lose your present; if you lose your kids, you lose your future. She has already lost her husband. Now she has lost her son. Look at how she responds, understandably so.

"And she said to Elijah, 'What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!'" She's basically asking the question that I told you everybody asks when they suffer, which is "Am I suffering because of my sin?" Everybody asks that question.

There *is* in the Bible... You have to have the category. Galatians 6 teaches sowing and reaping, so there *is* the principle in Scripture of sowing and reaping, but there is nothing in this story that makes us think this young boy died and she is suffering because of her sin. In fact, Elijah seems confused.

It says, ***"And he said to her, 'Give me your son.'"*** By the way, for a prophet or a godly man to touch a dead body was a no-no because it was considered unclean. He's like, "I don't care." He's desperate. So he grabs the body.

"And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. And he cried to the LORD, 'O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?'"

When things go bad, even the godliest people ask questions. Part of what we're trying to do here is just to say... All of us in here at some point, if we live long enough, are all going to go through something that we need to put in the box of mystery. "I mean, I'll pray about this, and I'll ask some questions, but I don't know why this happened. I don't think I'll ever know in this life why this happened. It's in the box of mystery."

By the way, what's interesting is when she's upset and making some claims about God that are inaccurate, he doesn't argue with her; he prays for her. I just wonder if that's a word for some of you. Who are you arguing with that you need to be praying for? He's like, "I'm not going to get into a theological debate with a woman who's suffering. What I'm going to do is I'm going to take her son, and I'm going to pray for him."

So here's what he does. ***"Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, 'O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again.'"*** It

sounds strange to us. He's stretching himself on the child. Most commentators think what he's doing is this is a picture of substitution.

It's desperation and substitution. "Lord, would you take my life and save his life? Lord, if there's any way for life to go out of me and into him..." By the way, he does it three times. Why? Because sometimes you're just desperate and you have to keep asking God. So he's praying.

"And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, 'See, your son lives.' And the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.'"

See, we're in a series called *Expectant*, and when I think about this first widow, and I think about her coming to faith in Yahweh... She came to faith in Yahweh not through persuasion but through the power of God. I think in America what we're really good at, because we have technology and AI and Wes Huff doing apologetics and you have a podcast and a book...

We always feel like, "Here's what we need. If we're going to lead someone to the Lord, we just need to persuade them." We're not against persuasion. Paul often would persuade people, but what we need in our church and what we're praying for through this series is the power of God.

See, what happens in the life of Elijah is God does a miracle *for* him, and then God does a miracle *through* him. They say the greatest miracle has already been done: the creation of the world, everything out of nothing. The second greatest miracle has been done: Jesus Christ dying in our place for our sin.

See, Jesus is the greater Elijah. In fact, what happens at the end of this story? The beloved firstborn son dies and is resurrected. That's the whole story of the gospel. Remember, the woman said, "Wait. Did he need to die because of my sin?" The answer is "No, that boy didn't need to die because of your sin, but Jesus Christ *did* need to die for your sin."

In fact, that's why he, like Elijah, was stretched out on the cross to say, "Could life come out of me and go to them?" Jesus touched us who were unclean and made us clean. So, here's the thing. This is almost hard to believe. The Bible says the same power, the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in those who believe.

If you'll bow your heads and close your eyes with me, I just want to pray for a minute. I just want us to think. Where do you need power in your life? Power is connected to prayer. Power is the grace of God coming *to* you and moving *through* you.

By the way, the purpose of miracles... Miracles are signs. They're pointers to another world, another age. They're pointers to heaven. That's why they're called *signs* in John's gospel. A miracle is simply when God shows up in power, and the response of people in light of miracles is always wonder.

Lord, I just want to pray right now for people, that you would give us the spiritual power to obey you. Lord, I pray for people in here, that you would give us the spirit of Elijah on our church, that we would stand up and stand out and, at times, stand against and, if we had to, stand alone.

Lord, there are people in here who are near the brook. There are other people who are experiencing a divine drought. There are people who you're repurposing their life, and you're redirecting them to a new assignment. Lord, I pray everybody in here would pass the test because Jesus passed the ultimate test on the cross. It's in his name we pray, amen.