

“Survive or Thrive”

Have you ever been part of something amazing? You worked hard, maybe trusted God and something spectacular came from it?

A student I had been praying hard for, and kept on wavering in their faith. I never gave up and kept praying, and then one day it was like a complete transformation. Something broke and they were down at the front being prayed for. And when they came back it was like they were a completely different person.

And to think... God allowed me to be a part of that.

To give a little background before today's scripture In 1 Kings 19. We have the prophet Elijah, and he is coming off of seeing God do amazing things. Most of Israel has turned away from God and is worshipping Baal. So Elijah challenges the priests of Baal to a contest in front of everyone. Two altars—one for God one for Baal. They pray to their god, Elijah prays to his God, whichever one shows up is the true God.

After hours of Baal priests trying, they get nothing. Elijah steps up and says a simple prayer and suddenly fire pours down from the sky and burns up the sacrifice. The people are amazed, and begin to worship God.

But he is not done yet. Elijah goes and starts praying for the end of the drought Israel has been going through. He sends King Ahab back home saying rain is coming. He continues to pray until he sees rain clouds off in the distance. Rain is coming. He then runs to meet up with Ahab and supernaturally beats Ahab's chariot on foot.

In the span of one afternoon, Elijah is like an avenger with the ability to call fire, rain, and run like the flash (I know wrong universe).

What an amazing day!!

And then it all comes crashing down.

1 Kings 19

“When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. ²So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: ‘May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them.’”

She is squashing the rebellion before it can get going. Seems like a silly threat, but I know there are some of you ladies out there... You can be all sweet and nice... but then mama bear comes out of you.

You might have just came from arguing with the kids, but then some random person tells of your child, and something deep inside is unleashed. You are scary.

This woman Jezebel is beyond that. She is terrifying. She is cutthroat. She is a murderer.

And after all God has done through Elijah what does he do?

³“Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. ⁴Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling 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 who have already died.’”

It might seem so confusing, as it did to me many times. How can he see all that and be part of some spectacular miracles, and so quickly go from calling down fire, to “let me die alone here in the desert.”

But Elijah ran into an issue I think many of us can relate to.

Our biggest deserts come immediately after our biggest wins.

You’ve been there before, where you have the best day and then you get home and your house is a disaster, and your dog decided to use the carpet as its rest room, and your AC isn’t turning on.

Whenever something great happens you can be sure something will knock you back to reality soon afterward.

I have two images here... both have to do with desert: **::Image 1 (news headline)::** One is a news article about 18 people who were lost in the desert. They had no food or water and were afraid they would die, but thanks to help they survived.

::Image 2 (Desert Rose):: The other is of some amazing flower that, despite awful desert conditions, can be found growing beautifully in the desert. Now, obviously, humans are a bit different than flowers. But both in a desert, one group just barely survives, while the other thrives.

Elijah is broken in a desert.

And everyone at some point finds themselves in the desert of life, where it's harsh, brutal and we don't think we will escape. Where everything has come crashing down, and maybe some of us are left there saying, "just let me die."

In that desert you have two choices: Survive or you can thrive.

Your greatest opportunities come at the most inopportune moments.

It's why getting a grasp on how to survive in those harsh desert moments of life are so key for our walk. We can be beaten up and feel torn down—but can come out of this desert season stronger than ever before.

See while Elijah was down in the desert, God was using it as an opportunity to grow him deeper. I don't know about you, but when I go through those desert experiences in my life—If God can use it as an opportunity to grow me, than God I want to grow, rather than just surviving through all the hurt and pain.

So looking at Elijah... How did he thrive and grow in the desert season, and what can we do to thrive? Here are the key things to know...

1. Don't go at it alone

When he first steps into the desert, Elijah, it says he leaves his servant behind and goes on alone.

Often times when we are facing that hard time, those deserts of our life, our first response is to isolate, to remove ourselves from everyone. There are different reasons for this, the pain is too hard, we are afraid of what others may say, we don't trust people, or it may be because we don't want others to see the hurt we are experiencing.

But the result is the same: we battle through this desert alone when God didn't create us to go through it alone.

We like to be on our own when we were not created to go through life by ourselves. Even all the way back in the Garden of Eden, it says God said it wasn't good for Adam to be alone, so He created Eve.

¹⁵“Then the LORD told him, ‘Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. ¹⁶Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as My prophet.’”

God's response is to go out and find specific people.

One of them being Elisha who became Elijah's protégé.

But God sent him out.

It's why, if you have been to the church long enough, you have heard so much about small groups. It's more than just getting deeper into the Word and a hangout. It creates a family where we can walk through this life, all the ups and downs together, with each other.

You were not made to be alone.

If you are in the front few rows you may have noticed there is a water bottle under your chair. How many times have you been in service, and—maybe it's the air—but you get a little parched. I've been there and wanted to hook any of you up with that water. Why? Because...

2. You are cared for.

Elijah is feeling alone, and pretty much abandoned and is asking to die. And what does God say to him?...

⁴“Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling 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 who have already died.’ ⁵Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, ‘Get up and eat!’ ⁶He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.”

Elijah is down and beaten up walking through this desert, and God’s response is, and probably starving after all he went through. And God’s response isn’t to correct him, to give plans for some great thing. It was to tell him to eat. Maybe he was hangry.

Think about that though. God cared for Elijah enough to address his minor, insignificant current need.

Some of you are feeling like no one cares about what I’m going through. The hurt and the pain I am experiencing. While I can’t testify to how everyone else sees it, I can say—that if God cares enough to provide a small meal to Elijah while he is in the desert, then He cares about the hurts, and struggles, the bad reports, the desert season you are going through.

Going through those times in the desert we can feel overwhelmed and on our own, like God has forgotten us, and yet He cares for you and what you are going through.

3. God is not unprepared (He still has a plan)

A few years back I was overseeing a missions trip to Guatemala. I planned out and had prepared for every minute we were there. Not a single thing slipped my notice. On this specific day we were going to stop by this

church we would be working with over the next week. It had a dirt floor, wood walls were rough. Gaps between wall and floor. We were told we would go and listen to the service and then return back to the place we were staying at for lunch.

We got there, and sat in the service. The pastor was speaking about our team and how excited they were for us to be there. Then she called for the kids and about 30 or so kids came in to take our team outside. The translator explained that the pastor said we would be teaching the kids for the next few hours.

Here I was unprepared, caught off guard, with no supplies, and no food, with 30 kids and my team for the next few hours.

There is nothing like being so caught off guard and having to scramble to put a new plan together.

Like many of us going through these desert experiences. I don't know about you but I have been there where I was so sure this had caught God off guard. All of this bad stuff happening, everything falling apart. "God, what happened? Where are You?"

And yet He is not surprised... and continues to use even your toughest moments as an opportunity. God doesn't waste a single tear you have cried, a pain you have suffered through. He will use them to change our lives and others. He has a plan.

As He told Elijah:

¹⁵“Then the LORD told him, ‘Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. ¹⁶Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as My prophet. ¹⁷Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha!’”

There is a comfort knowing that what I am going through can serve a bigger purpose than what I can see. Which leads to the last one...

4. Shift your focus

Elijah is saying he wants to die: “God I am all that is left. There is no one else.”

And yet God ends this section with a bit of realization.

¹⁸“Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!”

You think you are alone, but there are literally thousands of others who are standing with you. They are facing the same persecutions and testings to their faith. They are going through some of the same battles.

When I am battling through the deserts and hard times in my life sometimes I fall into the trap that I can't see anything else but me.

I have it the worst. I am under attack, I am alone.

And what ends up happening is I go through the desert feeling only sorry for me. And you know what it's like when we start overthinking and dwelling on yourself. You become a bigger victim in your head, and often times you make the situation bigger than it is.

That's not to take away the hurt and pain you are going through. It's not to minimize it. But sometimes we stay in the hard times and the desert moments in life longer than we need to because we are so focused on us, and if we only shifted our focus we could see others and a way out.

Elijah is making it like he is the last of all followers... and God's, like, “There are thousands who are being persecuted, hurt, or are under attack. So I need you to keep pushing through.”

Again not to minimize, but there is a good chance Elijah was in a safer place being so far away than some of the others. There is always going to be someone whose desert experience is worse than ours... Not only for your benefit but for others as well.

After God spoke to Elijah he left the desert and went out to continue with the plan.

No one desires to go through those moments of our life that leave us feeling like we are in the desert facing all the hardships—but they happen. And, like us, God was using the desert to teach and grow Elijah through it.

The key is being able to grow through those hurts and pains.

Because they will happen in your life.

But remember: **Your greatest opportunities often come at the most inopportune moments.**

Which means if you are going through something now it may be you are on the verge of something amazing on the other side of this desert.

But to make it through the desert moments in life we have to make sure we are not doing it alone. Get with those good Christian friends who will help you through. Don't isolate yourselves. If you aren't in a small group, get plugged in.

Realize that you aren't alone in this and that God cares about you. He hasn't abandoned you to this place. Instead He will use all of this for a greater purpose.

If my pain can transform someone else's life, I am all for God using my circumstances to change others.

And, finally, learning how to better shift your focus. To seeing all that God is doing around you, to see how He may use this, or what other people may be facing the same battles we are.

The desert moments don't last forever, and in the end we just survive them by the skin of our teeth—or if we walk through God's way, we can thrive and grow through the toughest moments of life.

::Survive or Thrive:: Slide