

Small Group Guide

28 Days of Prayer - Immanuel Baptist Church

Week 5 - September 15, 2024

Passage: Selected Scriptures

Study Authors: Clark and Aaryn Whitney

Introduction/Background Building:

- Here's the scene. There is a corrupt and godless government. People are scared to talk about the Bible in public. The culture is worshipping pleasure, power, sex, and money. Everyone just does whatever they think is right.
- The scene is not America in 2024; it's Israel in the days of Elijah.
- Elijah was one of the greatest figures in the Bible. He shows up several times throughout the Bible, but 1 and 2 Kings give us the most information about him.
- Elijah lived in a day much like our own: everyone doing whatever they wanted to do, lawlessness, corrupt government, child sacrifice (abortion), persecution of God's people, worship of sex, power, and money.
- Why study Elijah? We study Elijah to learn about:
 - God's faithfulness to His people in a godless society.
 - How we can stay faithful to God in a darkening world.
 - How we can face discouragement, oppression, and depression through faith in God.
- Key verses for 28 Days of Prayer:
- James 5:16-18 NLT
 - 16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.
 - 17 Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years!

18 Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain, and the earth began to yield its crops.

Last Week: After the showdown at Mt. Carmel, Elijah ran to the wilderness and experienced discouragement and depression. God ministered to Elijah in his “low time” through an angel. We saw how taking time to rest, eating good food, finding a purpose, connecting with friends, and experiencing the presence of God all help us face times of depression.

- What are some lessons you’ve learned during our study of Elijah?
- What have you learned about prayer throughout these 28 days?

In this final lesson, let’s debrief what we’ve learned, summarize the story, and prepare ourselves for living faithfully in “Day 29,” after our 28 Days of Prayer is complete.

Lessons from Elijah

1. Elijah was a “man like us” (James 5:17). He faced temptations, fears, anxiety, depression, and rejection. He had strengths and weaknesses. He got tired and frustrated. He probably doubted God at times. He reminds us that we’re finite and often feeble in our own strength.

- How does it encourage you to know that Elijah and other characters in the Bible were human like us?

2. Elijah trusted God. In following God’s plan, Elijah declared a drought in the land to the most powerful man in Israel. Elijah fled to the wilderness, where ravens fed him food each day. Later, he saw the Widow of Zarephath’s son die and prayed for God to raise him from the dead. He called down fire from heaven in an epic

showdown against hundreds of false prophets of Baal. He fled from Jezebel when she put a bounty on his head. In all of these situations and more, Elijah was called to exercise his trust in God.

- If you were in Elijah's shoes, would you find it hard to trust God? Why or why not?
- What are the hardest areas of your life to trust God in?

3. Elijah served God. In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah told Ahab "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, *whom I serve.*" Elijah submitted himself to God's plan. He followed God and His instructions. Instead of taking the easy way out by bowing the knee to Baal, Elijah determined to follow God wholeheartedly, no matter the consequences.

- Has it ever been hard for you to serve God? If so, what made it difficult?
- "If you displease God, it doesn't matter who you please. If you please God, it doesn't matter who you displease." How does this simple truth apply to living for God today?

Lessons from Ahab and Jezebel

1. Our friends and family have a big influence on the spiritual condition of our souls. Ahab was passive and allowed his wife, Jezebel to call the shots. This wicked alliance led Israel to fall deeper and deeper into idol worship. The Bible says that Ahab "did more to provoke the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than any of the other kings of Israel before him" (1 Kings 16:33). Jezebel's rebellion and Ahab's compromise worked together for wickedness.

On the flip side, a positive example of the influence of friends is Elijah and Elisha. These two men teamed up as friends to follow God together, and God used them to confront idolatry.

We need to choose our friends wisely; if you're a young person, you must choose your future spouse wisely. In many ways, we take on the attitudes, affections, and actions of our closest friends and family members. It's important to make sure that our friends and family help us follow God instead of pushing us from Him.

- When has a friend made a positive influence on your walk with God? Who is a friend who has helped you follow Jesus?

2. Evil never stops itself. Ahab continued the descent into wickedness, which was begun by his father, Omri, and forefather, Jeroboam. 1 Kings 16:29-33 says that Ahab did “more to provoke the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than any of the other kings of Israel before him.” Sadly, Israel slipped further and further into depravity and sin. Ahab set up a temple for Baal and an Asherah pole.

It wasn't until God raised up Elijah that the tide began to turn. Elijah was a man shaped by convictions and not by culture.

In Matthew 5, Jesus told his followers that they are the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world”:

Matthew 5:15-16 ESV 14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

We are supposed to shine as lights in the darkness of evil by living out the truth of the Bible and showing people the love of Jesus.

Sometimes, this means speaking out against evil and wickedness. Sometimes, this means standing up for the truth when everyone else is bowing down in compromise. Sometimes, this means doing a good work for someone who can do you no good in return.

- What does it mean to be in the world but not of it?
- Why is it essential to flee evil and idolatry when the world is obsessed with it?

Lessons from Obadiah

1. God places people in secular positions to honor and serve Him. 1 Kings 18:3 says that Obadiah was in charge of Ahab's palace and that he was a "devoted follower of the Lord" (NLT). Serving God in a public position is not a contradiction. God often places His people in secular positions to advance His kingdom. In this case, Obadiah protected 100 of the Lord's prophets when Jezebel tried to kill them.

Have you ever thought about your job, educational position, or place of service as a gift from God to advance His kingdom?

2. It's always right to face our fears with faith. When Elijah met Obadiah, he asked Obadiah to tell Ahab that he had arrived. Since Elijah was on "Israel's Most Wanted," Obadiah was afraid that Ahab would "shoot the messenger" and that Elijah would disappear. Elijah promised to meet with Ahab (1 Kings 18:15), and Obadiah obeyed God's plan.

- When have you been afraid because God was calling you to do something?
- Why is it important to face our fears with faith?

Lessons on Prayer

Prayer and reliance on God are woven all throughout the story of Elijah. James 5:16-18 NLT tells us:

16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

17 Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years!

18 Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain, and the earth began to yield its crops.

What is prayer?

- **Prayer is your heart talking to God's heart.**

Not magic words or repeated phrases. You can't impress God, you can only share what's on your heart and seek His heart and will above all else.

- **Prayer is communication, not checkboxes.**

Prayer shouldn't be a dull routine or just doing it to say you did it, but communing and communicating with God.

- **Prayer is a "get to," not a "have to."**

When done right, prayer is a joy, not a chore. It's communicating with our heavenly Father who loves us, wants to be close to us, and wants to bless us.

- **Prayer is seeking His will, not just my wishlist.**

God isn't Santa Claus or a magic genie. We can tell Him our needs, but most of all, we pray for His will to be done in our lives.

- **Prayer is following a plan, not putting on a performance.**

Prayer is not seeing who can outdo the other with fancy language or loudness; prayer is earnestly and intentionally seeking God.

- **Prayer should be the first thing, not a finishing touch.**

Sometimes, we pray as a last resort or make all our plans and then ask God to bless them. We need to pray first! Prayer changes things!

- What have you learned about prayer through these 28 Days?
- What lessons and habits will you take with you going forward?
- How can we pray and encourage each other to stand strong in prayer?