



SERMON GUIDE

The God Life

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Life Begins Here

The God Life | Week 5 | 1 Kings 17:1-9

Introduction

If you say that someone is “living the good life,” you mean they’re living in comfort and luxury with few problems or worries. The good life is what our culture celebrates—financial success, personal comfort, and freedom from hardship. But there’s something far greater, far more fulfilling, and far more enduring than the good life—it’s “The God Life.” God wants you to experience the good life by living the God life. It is a life lived in the intimate presence of God, made possible through the supernatural power of God, all for the magnificent praise of God. The God life ignites when you’re accomplishing the divine purpose God created you for, reflecting His glory in everything you do, and offering His goodness to a broken world that desperately needs it. How do you enter the God life? Learn from a man by the name of Elijah.

Key Points

1. We All Have a Special Calling From God

Who is Elijah? The Bible introduces him in 1 Kings 17:1 simply as: "Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead" (NIV)—a place so insignificant history forgot it. James 5:17 says, "Elijah was a human being, even as we are" (NIV). This mighty prophet battles despair, doubt, and depression—just like us. Yet God chooses this ordinary man to confront King Ahab, who has defiantly rejected the Lord and His ways. Elijah boldly speaks against evil, becoming public enemy #1. And his courage costs him dearly, forcing him to flee for his life. Today, speaking God's truth remains unpopular. But you're called to the same mission—to stand with God when others won't, speak for God when truth is silenced, and surrender to God when the world bows to no one.

God uses ordinary people like Elijah—and you—to stand for His truth in a world that rejects it.

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2. We All Should Have Unshakable Confidence in God

Elijah follows God without hesitation. We often expect our obedience to be rewarded with comfort and ease, but Elijah's faithfulness puts him on the run—Ahab and Jezebel want him dead. God doesn't send him to a five-star hotel but to Kerith Ravine in the harsh wilderness between Jerusalem and Jericho. There, he drinks from the stream and receives food from ravens—unclean animals. Why this wilderness detour? Because you can truly come to know God when you are completely alone with Him. The essential lesson of the God life is simple: Trust and obey, even when the path seems to make no sense. At Kerith, Elijah learned utter dependence upon God.

These seasons of isolation and complete dependence on God build the unshakable confidence that sustains you through greater challenges ahead.

3. We Should Have a Strong Commitment to God

Even when it doesn't make sense, Elijah obeys God completely, venturing into the wilderness with nothing but Heaven's provision sustaining him. But what happens when God's provision seems to dry up? Scripture tells us, "Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land" (1 Kings 17:7, NIV). Obedience doesn't guarantee perfect conditions. Financial brooks dry up (your 401K plummets), vocational brooks dry up (your position is eliminated), relational brooks dry up (a marriage crumbles), and health brooks dry up (the diagnosis is devastating). When your brook dries up, God is asking one direct question: "Where is your trust?" But God never closes one door without opening another. When the resources dry up, God instructs Elijah, "Go at once to Zarephath ... I have directed a widow there to supply you with food" (1 Kings 17:9, NIV).

When resources dry up, God isn't testing your comfort but your trust, always providing new sources of provision when you remain committed to Him.

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Key Takeaway

The God life isn't built on comfortable circumstances but on unshakable trust. Elijah's story isn't about what an extraordinary man did for God, but what an extraordinary God did through an ordinary man who simply trusted and obeyed.

Reflection Questions:

1. In what area of your life is God calling you to stand for His truth even when it might be unpopular or difficult? What's keeping you from responding with the same boldness as Elijah?

2. Think about a time when God sent you to your own "Kerith Ravine"—a place of isolation or difficulty that ultimately deepened your dependence on Him. What did you learn about God's character through that experience?

3. What "brook" in your life seems to be drying up right now? How might God be using this circumstance to redirect your trust more fully to Him rather than to your resources?

Never Doubt God

The God Life | Week 6 | 1 Kings 17:7-24

Introduction

Ever find yourself staring at the ceiling at 3 AM, whispering desperate questions like, "God, where are you?" "Do you even care about me?" "Are my prayers hitting the ceiling and bouncing back?" If so, you're following in the footsteps of spiritual giants. In 1 Kings 17, the great prophet Elijah barely survived a powerful showdown with false prophets, idolaters, and a wicked king and queen. Alone and desperate at the bank of a small brook, receiving food from scavenging ravens, Elijah looks doubt in the eye. Maybe you've followed God and lived according to His Word, but the economy crashes, you lose your job, or the marriage ends. What do you hold on to when doubt feels stronger than belief? Watch how Elijah walks through the valley of despair to the other side of doubt, remembering one timeless truth: If you trust and obey, God clears the way. As you trust God, you discover His promise, provision, providence, and power.

Key Points

1. Never Doubt God's Promise

Have you ever heard advice that made your eyes roll? Something like, *Cheer up! Things could be worse.* And then things did, in fact, get worse. In Elijah's desperate moment, God tells him to travel 100 miles—not by car or plane, but on foot—straight into enemy territory, the heartland of Baal worship! Scripture says in 1 Kings 17:8–9, “Then the word of the LORD came to him: ‘Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there’” (NIV). Once Elijah reaches his destination, God instructs him to ask a starving pagan widow to make him dinner. And Elijah obeys, despite his understandable objections. Why? He trusts God’s promise. God told him to go. He had trusted God’s Word to him in the past, so he obeys again. When God decides to increase your faith, He will inevitably test your faith. Elijah could have reasonably said, “I’m not doing that.”

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But he chooses to believe God and discovers God's faithfulness. Perhaps the winds and storms of life that are breaking your heart might also be what strengthen your faith.

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When things don't seem to be going your way, remember they're going God's way. And God's way never leads to a dead end; it leads to a divine appointment.

2. Never Doubt God's Provision

Picture the scene. God sends Elijah to a widow on the brink of starvation. Because the drought and famine are so severe, fear and agony tighten their grip as she sees her son, believing their future looks like death or slavery. In this setting, what God asks Elijah to do seems almost cruel. "Before you make bread for yourself and your son, make some for me" (see 1 Kings 17:13). How could God do this? Elijah has seen God come through before, so he tells this woman that if she will trust him—and trust the God that he serves—she will never run out of flour or oil. Don't we all sometimes try to strike deals with God? "Lord, if You'll just get me out of this mess, I promise I'll never ..." Sound familiar? We've all been there. He trusted God's promise not because it made sense, but because he knew the Promise-Maker. And that's why the flour never ran out and the oil kept flowing.

When you trust God beyond what makes sense, He provides beyond what seems possible. That's not just a principle from Scripture; it's a promise for your life today.

3. Never Doubt God's Providence

Just when things are looking up, the bottom falls out again. The widow's son suddenly stops breathing. This is not only tragic but also terrifying. Her only hope for the future is gone. The widow—familiar with Baal worship—understands angry, vindictive gods who punish humans. With anguish in her voice, she



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asks what she's done to deserve this. But Elijah doesn't have an answer. So he cries out to God. "Then he cried out to the LORD, 'LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?'" (I Kings 17:20, NIV). Elijah faces doubt, too! Like us, he wonders, *I don't get it. Why did You bring me here, and why did this happen?* Your questions don't shock God, and they don't shake His throne. Sometimes God gives you the answer and you won't fully understand until Heaven. But everything in this story occurs under the watchful eye and loving hand of Almighty God. He knows what He's doing, and He's working His plan for good. But in the waiting and confusion, you must trust Him.

When your heart is breaking and your faith is shaking, remember this: God knows what He's doing even when you don't know what He's doing.

4. Never Doubt God's Power

As Yogi Berra famously said, "It ain't over 'til it's over." Because with God, the worst thing is never the last thing. "'Give me your son,' Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed" (1 Kings 17:19, NIV). Elijah has a problem so great, he cannot solve it. When you have no power to handle a problem, you can always go to the God who does. Elijah gets before God and prays, lying prostrate on the dead body. Remember, there's no manual or YouTube video on how to raise a dead boy back to life. But miraculously, his life returns. Faith is not just believing God for what He has done in the past; it's believing God for what He's never done before. Both Elijah and the widow trust God like never before. In the dark valleys of confusion, your trust in God becomes the bridge between your questions and His perfect plan.

Elijah believes that God can do what he can't do. Faith is not just believing God for what He has done in the past; it's believing God for what He's never done before.

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Key Takeaway

When doubt threatens your faith, remember Elijah's experience. Trust God's promises when they don't make sense, expect His provision when resources run dry, rest in His providence when tragedy strikes, and rely on His power when facing impossible situations.

Reflection Questions:

1. What specific promise from God's Word do you need to trust today, even though your circumstances are screaming that it's impossible? Which of these promises will you choose to stand on this week?

2. Think about a time when God provided for you in an unexpected way. How does remembering that specific provision help you face the empty cupboard or season of drought you might be experiencing right now?

3. Where in your life are you still asking God, "Why?" Instead of just waiting for an answer, what step of obedience could you take today that demonstrates your trust in the God who wants to hear your questions and holds your future?

Bring the Umbrella

The God Life | Week 7 | 1 Kings 18:41-46

Introduction

It is the worst drought in biblical history: 3½ years, 42 months, 1,278 days, 30,660 hours without a single drop of rain. Imagine that for a moment. The stench of death from countless animal carcasses, every day dreading the immense thirst. It's safe to say if you were in the umbrella business you went out of business. Even to this day with all of our technological advancement, all of our increase in knowledge, and all of our financial resources and education, we know (whether we admit it or not) that only God can get us out of drought. Through one of the most famous prophets in the Old Testament, you see how you, too, can live the God life—a life that is pure, powerful, and prayerful. You can see God work in your family, at work, and in your future because the secret to a powerful life is a prayerful life.

Key Points

1. Pray Privately

Toward the end of 1 Kings 18, Elijah gives orders to the king, "And Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain'" (v. 41, NIV). What is going on here? In the original Hebrew language, it says, "I hear the feet of rain approaching." We don't know if Elijah physically heard this or sensed it in his spirit. Either way, he declares that God is about to keep His promise, despite seeing no clouds at all. Any weatherman might tell Elijah he has lost his mind. What did Elijah do next?

“So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees” (I Kings 18:42, NIV). While the king feasts, the prophet falls to his knees. He goes to a private place and begins to pray. He doesn’t see a cloud in the sky or a drop of rain, but he hears the rain coming. There is sound before sight. This is what the Apostle Paul means when he later instructs you to “live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7, NIV).

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How can you do this? Begin by praying privately. Why? Because when you pray privately, you know you're not trying to impress anyone and you also let God know you believe Him. You mean business. When you want to get close to the heart of God, you leave the cell phone, laptop, noise, and distractions.

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Charles Spurgeon said, “Keep your public prayer short and sweet and let your private prayers go as long as you want.” The breakthrough downpour comes to those who pray when no one sees, and believe before the clouds even form.

2. Pray Passionately

When you're desperate, what's your prayer posture? We're told, Elijah “bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees” (1 Kings 18:42, NIV). The word for “bent down” means this was not casual prayer but spiritual warfare. You can pray in any position, but you're often driven to your knees when you mean business with God. The book of James describes Elijah's prayer this way, “He prayed earnestly ...” (James 5:17, NIV). God does business with those who mean business with Him. When you pray, how do you pray? Is your passion proportional to the need, or do you cry out to God with the same intensity no matter the situation? Asking the Lord to bless your meal and praying for your 15-year-old child who is barely clinging to life often sound different. But God invites you to pray passionately at all times, not just in emergencies. When it comes to prayer, pray what you mean and mean what you pray.

God doesn't count your words; He weighs your heart. When you pray like Elijah—with your whole being—Heaven comes to earth.



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3. Pray Pointedly

Notice how specifically Elijah prays. We find his prayer 800 years later in the Book of James.

“Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:17-18, NIV). Elijah wasn’t just praying, “Lord, would you please bless our country again? Would you please make everybody happy again?” He said specifically, “Lord, just as you made it stop raining, would you make it start raining?” Detailed prayers demonstrate you’ve thought deeply about what you’re asking and why you’re asking it. If you need a job, ask for a job with the location, hours, and company you want to work at. Seeking education? Ask God to open a door for you to get into a specific school. Looking to marry? Pray that you meet someone who walks uprightly and seeks God wholeheartedly. Pray pointedly.

When you pray with Elijah-like precision, you demonstrate your belief that God is powerful enough to act and personal enough to care about the specifics.

4. Pray Persistently

When Heaven seems silent, how do you continue praying? Elijah is not just praying to God to send the rain; he’s waiting for God to send the rain. And he waits. And he waits. “‘Go and look toward the sea,’ he told his servant. And he went up and looked. ‘There is nothing there,’ he said. Seven times Elijah said, ‘Go back.’ The seventh time the servant reported, ‘A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea’” (1 Kings 18:43-44, NIV). Six times this prophet tells his servant to go scan the sky for even a sign of a drop of rain, and six times the boy comes back with the same message, “There is nothing there.” Though the sky seems to mock his prayers, Elijah prays anyway. He knows something you need to remember: When you’re praying

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for rain there may not be a cloud in the sky, but God is in the sky. He repeats his prayer not once or twice, but seven times. Do you want God to answer? Keep asking. Do you want to find what you're looking for? Keep seeking. Do you want the door to be opened? Keep knocking. Your seventh prayer may bring a breakthrough downpour.

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The absence of clouds doesn't mean the absence of God. Keep praying. When you wait in faith, you become a vessel of His power and provision.

5. Pray Positively

Faith sees a flood in the first raindrop. Notice what happens on the seventh time the servant comes back to Elijah. "The seventh time the servant reported, 'A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea.' So Elijah said, 'Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you'"' (1 Kings 18:44, NIV). At this point, all Elijah sees is a cloud as small as a man's hand, barely above the horizon. He squints and says to the servant, "Go tell Ahab he better get in his chariot and hit the road before the rain drowns him." Why was he so sure? How did he know? How could he be so positive? Simply, God keeps His promises. He doesn't give false hope or cross His fingers. He doesn't say, "I might," "I may," or "I should." When God makes a promise, He stakes His reputation on two unshakable words: "I will." And Elijah built his life on that firm foundation.

Faith responds to God's promises with confidence before seeing the evidence. When you pray, act on the small cloud as if the storm is already on its way.



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Key Takeaway

The God life isn't built on comfortable circumstances but on unshakable trust. Elijah's story isn't about what an extraordinary man did for God, but what an extraordinary God did through an ordinary man who simply trusted and obeyed.

Reflection Questions:

1. When your child is sick, your prayers likely become urgent and intense, but what about Tuesday morning's routine prayers? Consider this: Could you select one "ordinary" prayer this week (for a coworker's project, your spouse's day, or a friend's small decision) and approach it with the same focused intensity you'd bring to a crisis? What specific time and place could you set aside for this focused, ordinary prayer?

2. What would your prayer look like if it included specific outcomes, timeframes, and heart changes you're seeking? Select one area and write down this focused prayer, being as detailed as if you were placing an exact order rather than browsing a catalog.

3. Elijah's faith in God continued, even when he didn't see the answer right away. When was the last time you remember praying a "seventh time prayer," and what did you learn about God's character?

Stand Tall, Stand Strong

The God Life | Week 8 | 2 Kings 1:1-18

Introduction

In the aftermath of any tragedy, we face this reality: Evil is real and rampant. There is no place on this planet that is evil-free. As one author wrote, “I will never understand those who can read the headlines every day and then assert that people are basically good... Evil is woven into the fabric of humanity.” Throughout our study of Elijah, we’ve seen him facing or fleeing evil, but always returning to fight it, because that’s what it means to live the God life. And it’s not to be confused with the good life. While the good life might avoid evil, ignore it, or let others deal with it, those living the God life don’t have that option.

Now, as we near the close of Elijah's story, we find him confronting Ahaziah, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. Though Elijah might have hoped for retirement after the deaths of Ahab and Jezebel, evil continued through their son. And one central truth emerges: When you look up to God, you'll stand out from the crowd and often be told to stand down. But when you stand with God, He gives you the power to stand tall and strong in Him.

Key Points

1. We Will Confront the Presence of Evil

Ten years after confronting Ahab, Elijah faces a new challenge. Ahab's son Ahaziah now reigns, and, despite having witnessed the drought, the fire on Mount Carmel, and his parents' deaths exactly as Elijah prophesied, he follows the same evil path. When Ahaziah injures himself, he sends messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the "lord of the flies," instead of turning to God.

The prophet Isaiah warned against turning to false gods, asking: "When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists ... should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (Isaiah 8:19, NIV). Maybe you've felt pressure to compromise or stay silent. But I want to encourage

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you today: The God life doesn't avoid evil; it confronts it with truth and love. Like Elijah, you can be the one person in your office, classroom, or family who stands for God's truth. When you do, you stand in the power of the One who has already overcome the world.

Notes

■ Evil will always be present in this world, but God has equipped you to face it directly with courage and faith rather than shrinking back in fear.

2. We Must Condemn the Practice of Evil

God instructs Elijah to intercept the king's messengers with this rebuke: "Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub ...? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!" (2 Kings 1:16, NIV). This message would likely cost Elijah his life, but he delivers it anyway. Many today, including 40% of Protestant pastors, admit feeling limited in speaking about moral and social issues, fearing that they may offend others.

Let me speak directly to your heart: Speaking truth in today's culture isn't easy. You may worry about being labeled intolerant, losing friends, hurting your career, or facing rejection. I understand those fears; they're real. But remember this: Someone's eternity may depend on your willingness to lovingly speak God's truth. You don't need to be harsh or condemning, but you do need to be clear and courageous. Start by asking God to give you both wisdom and boldness.

■ Standing for truth will make you unpopular, but your courageous words, spoken in love, could be exactly what someone needs to hear to find their way to God.



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3. We Should Confirm the Punishment of Evil

Despite having three chances to repent, King Ahaziah remained stubborn. The judgment declared by Elijah came to pass exactly as prophesied: "So he died, according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken" (2 Kings 1:17, NIV). There is such a thing as the fire of God's judgment on sin and evil. While God is good and merciful, He is also just and serious about punishing those who disobey and deny Him. In this entire story, only one man—Elijah—actually stood for what was right and against what was wrong.

Our culture desperately wants to emphasize God's love while ignoring His justice. As believers, we must present the whole truth. When you share your faith with others, don't shy away from speaking about sin and its consequences. But do this with tears in your eyes and compassion in your heart.

While God offers multiple chances to repent, consequences await those who reject Him. Your loving warning could be the very thing that leads someone to salvation.

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Key Takeaway

Standing up for what's right in the face of evil isn't easy, but stand strong! You never know when God will use you to speak the biblical truth that will pull someone else from sin's grasp.

Reflection Questions:

1. Think about a time when you stayed silent when you should have spoken up against something wrong. What held you back, and how might you respond differently in the future?

2. Elijah didn't water down God's message, even though it was unpopular and dangerous. In what areas of your life might God be calling you to speak truth that others don't want to hear?

3. What practical step could you take this week to move from being a silent believer to a vocal advocate for God's truth?
