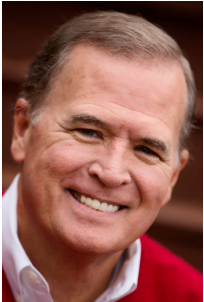


MAGNOLIA MINDS: Long Days, Dark Nights, and God's grace

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Elijah is one of my favorite Bible characters. Prophets of God were peculiar men, and Elijah embodied peculiarity like few others. Situations and circumstances that would make us turn back made him run forward.

He voiced God's truth with the impact of a lightning bolt. He trusted God in gigantic ways. He spent months in obscure confinement listening only to God's truth. He ate road kill from ravens, but obeyed God anyway.

I don't enjoy examining the flaws and faults of my heroes. I prefer to focus on their courageous exploits rather than their spineless foibles. I understand that Elijah had feet of clay and I'm encouraged to know that he had a nature like ours (James. 5:17). He was subject to the same limitations and temptations that we are.

When Elijah heard that Jezebel wanted him dead, his faith wilted. He fled nearly 300 miles south and ultimately arrived at Mt. Horeb. Elijah was a weary and broken man. The worm of despair had gnawed an abscess into the core of his soul. The rugged outlier who once seemed invincible was hiding and wanting to die.

It may have been a similar despair that drove a lady to call me late one night. I'm not real lucid when I awaken from a deep sleep. The lady apologized but said she didn't want to reveal her name. Then she unloaded a bombshell question: "If a Christian commits suicide can they go to heaven? I need an answer because I'm holding a loaded pistol."

I gathered my thoughts and quickly prayed for wisdom. She continued, "I love Jesus, but I'm tired of living in fear and discouragement." "Okay, I hear you," I replied. "Let's just tap the brakes and exhale. May I ask you something? If you love Jesus and you trust His design for you in Heaven, what hinders you from trusting His design for you here on earth?"

"If Jesus is enough for you there and then, why can't He be enough for you here and now?" "I...I... well, I don't know," she sobbed.

Seizing the moment, I emphasized her significance and worth. I explained that Jesus wanted her to choose life even when it's hard and miserable. She apologized again for the late call, and she allowed me to pray with her.

Several months later, a lady introduced herself at church. She spoke with joy and confidence about her life and paused for an awkward moment until she said, "Thank you, pastor. I'm the person who called you in the middle of the night. I was in a dark place, but you reminded me that the Lord was greater than my moods and bigger than my fears."

When Elijah was in a cave at Mt. Horeb, he was in a dark place spiritually. His fear was bigger than his faith. Fatigue had crushed a spiritual warrior. He couldn't heal himself. He needed an intervention from God to make a recovery.

The same God who applied His remedy to Elijah's misery still offers the same healing prescription today:

– **Rest.** God created rest. He ordained it as a necessary part

of life. Elijah probably had no knowledge of the medical benefits of sleep, but he benefited from it anyway. He didn't need to challenge one more Baal prophet. He needed to rest. He didn't need to perform like a crusader. He needed to rest like a child.

Jesus invites the worn and weary, the bruised and broken, to rest under His yoke, not merely for a day but forever.

– **Nourishment.** The critical role of nutrition in recovery is well documented, from Harvard Medical School to Mayo Clinic. Researchers inform us that the relationship between the gut and the brain confirms that healthy nutrition decreases the risk of depression and enhances positive mental health.

God knew exactly what Elijah needed. That's why He directed an angel to compel Elijah to eat not just once, but twice.

– **Dialogue.** God nudged Elijah toward self-examination and asked him what he was doing in a cave (I Kgs.19:9). God always arranges a dialogue with disillusioned believers. Whether it's a craggy cave on a mountain or an untidy closet in a home, God can speak to your heart and start a dialogue for recovery.

Elijah voiced his frustration to God. More likely, Elijah vented his turmoil. God listened to Elijah's broken heart and told Elijah to stand before Him on the mountain.

God proved to a dismayed prophet that He could work in simple ways even as He could in sensational ways. It was God's low whisper of a still, small voice that pierced into Elijah's soul. It was God's holy hush that wooed Elijah out of the cave and back into service.

Long days and dark nights come to all who faithfully follow the Lord, but His grace is sufficient when our strength is gone. Moreover, when God gets finishes with us we discover that why we are coming out of a cave is always different and far better than why we were going into the cave.

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