

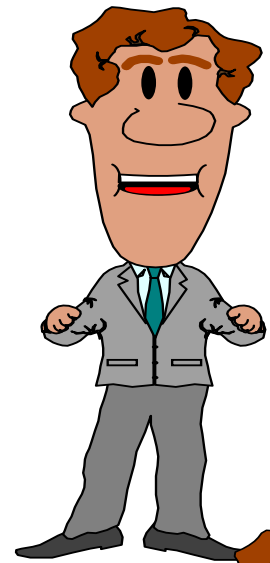
GODLY MANHOOD

Lessons from Elijah

By Jerry Schmoyer

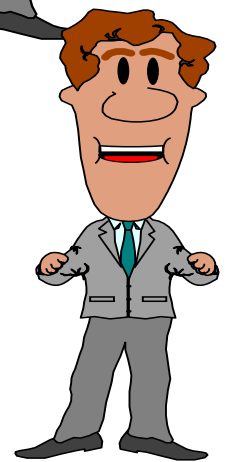
1. IDOLATRY'S SUBTLE PULL
2. GOD PROVIDES FOR HIS OWN
3. CRISIS PRAYING
4. MEN OF INTEGRITY
5. AVOIDING RATIONALIZATION
6. COURAGE TO SPEAK UP FOR GOD
7. OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

8. MEN NEED FRIENDS



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GODLY MANHOOD **Lessons from Elijah**



1. IDOLATRY'S SUBTLE PULL

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Elijah is one of the unsung heroes of the Bible. He usually isn't rated with Moses, Abraham, David and Daniel, but he certainly should be! He did great things for God. His prayers of faith are unequalled. His boldness in standing up for God is legendary. Yet he was a man like us. He experienced intense fear and deep loneliness. Sometimes he doubted God. Other times he allowed his anger to distort his thinking. Still, God used and rewarded him in a great way. He did many, many miracles -- more than anyone in the Old Testament except Moses. He never even died but was taken to heaven without death. When Jesus needed someone to fellowship with, God sent Moses and Elijah to speak with the transfigured Jesus. Learning about Elijah, and discovering principles men can apply to their lives, will be an exciting adventure. For most, studying Elijah is fresh territory. Let him speak to you today.

THE MAN WITHOUT A PAST Despite being such a special, important man, we know nothing about Elijah's past. He just pops onto the scene in I Kings 17:1. Nothing is mentioned about his parents, his early years, when or how God called him to serve Him, if he was married -- nothing but that he was from a town named Tishbe. Tishbe has never been discovered by archaeologists, and we don't even know where it was located. Thus Elijah steps into history as a man without a past. But, then, it's not our past that God is concerned about. It's our present

and future that matter to Him! No matter what your past is, God wipes it clean and uses you from this day forward.

THE NATION WITH A PAST While Elijah didn't have a past, the nation of Israel certainly did! They failed to trust and obey God as their king and insisted on having a king like everyone else (I Sam. 8:7). Never try to be like 'everyone else' -- it usually ends in disaster. Saul's reign was a disaster. David started out well but then sinned and suffered the consequences the rest of his life. Solomon, his son, only partly obeyed God. His many pagan wives brought their idols and heathen gods with them and established idol worship in Jerusalem. When the nation split, Jeroboam, the king of the northern 10 tribes ("Israel"), set up golden calves in Bethel and Dan. God clearly showed how he felt about this at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 32:31-35). God clearly forbade idolatry (Exodus 20:4-5). Still, Ahab had non-Levites be the priests (I Kings 12:31) and offered sacrifices (v. 32) to these idols. He claimed they were still worshipping God (Jehovah).

FROM BAD TO WORSE This continued until Ahab became king, and then it got much worse (I Kings 16:30). He considered it "trivial" to commit the sins Jeroboam had committed (v. 31). He married Jezebel, the daughter of a pagan king and priest who followed in her father's footsteps. Instead of the awful sin of worshipping Jehovah in the form of golden calves, he brought in pagan gods to worship. Ahab and Jezebel brought in the worship of the Philistine god Baal and his consort (female companion) the goddess Ashtaroath. These were gods of fertility and were worshipped in the most immoral sexual excesses. By the way, Ashtaroath was known as Eshtaroath by the Germanic tribes and forms the basis of our 'Easter' practices today (eggs and rabbits are symbols of fertility). In Rome she was known as 'cupid', the goddess of lust!

Well, this made God angrier than anything the Jews had done so far (I Kings 16:33). Thus He withheld rain on the land for over 3 years, as Elijah told Ahab would happen (I Kings 17:1). Whether God told Elijah to say this, or Elijah knew it would happen because God had promised this curse on idolatry (Deut 11:16-17; 28:23-24; Lev. 26:19-20) and went on his own initiative we don't know. However it happened, God supported all Elijah said and there was no rain (James 5:17). Either way, it took tremendous courage to stand against the idolatry of the day. Everyone was doing it, it seemed the modern thing to do, the sophisticated current fad in worship! Also, it appealed to the flesh for it was a very sensual worship. The only way we can see what a major stand Elijah took was to put ourselves in his shoes. Actually, maybe we are in his shoes today more than we think!

MODERN IDOLS While idols are still worshipped in many parts of the world, and even by some 'Christian' groups, for the most part we aren't tempted by images of people and animals in wood and stone. We are too 'enlightened' to fall for that! We'd never worship a calf made of gold -- we just worship the gold! Just because we don't have those kinds of idols doesn't mean we don't have any idols at all! An idol is anything that we put before God, that means more to us than Him, that we turn to in order to have some need met. Everyone has something first in life, and if it isn't God it is an idol.

We have as many and varied idols today as the pagans did. Some worship other people (like Elvis Presley, Madonna, their favorite singer or athlete, a movie star or a financial or business success). More common is worship of things: a car, house, boat, dress, piece of jewelry or whatever. Greed is rampant today, and is an idol (Matthew 6:24). When possessions or things come before God they are idols. When our faith is in our financial resources and insurances we aren't trusting God (Matthew 6:33). When we find meaning and satisfaction in our job, career, position, income or possessions we are idolaters. Men often measure themselves and their 'success' by these standards.

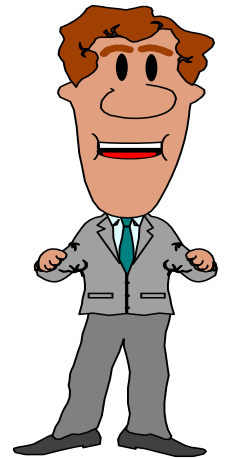
Other false gods today include sex. Society is saturated with it, must as in the days of Ahab and Elijah. It is hard to stand against! Immoral or impure thoughts or actions are idols as God clearly says (Eph. 5:5). We turn to this to fulfill needs that should be met other ways.

I think one of the biggest dangers Christian men have is to make their relationship with their wife and children their idols. Jesus clearly says HE must be first (Matthew 10:37-38). When we are more concerned with what our family thinks of us or doing things they will like than we are of what God thinks of us and doing what He wants (even if it isn't popular) then we are making these people idols for we are putting them before God. If we are unwilling to give them up to God to do whatever He chooses in their lives we are making them idols. If we value their approval more than God's, if we look to them for all our meaning and satisfaction, if can't say "no" or make the tough decisions based just on what GOD wants, then they are idols!

IDOL-PROOFING YOUR LIFE Honestly and prayerfully seek your own mind and heart. Ask God to show you any idols you may have (Psalm 139:23). Anything that comes to mind as perhaps being too important about, commit to God in prayer. He is a jealous God and wants ALL of us (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Dt. 5:9). Develop a close, personal, intimate relationship with Him so you won't need any substitutes. "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (I John 5:21).

GODLY MANHOOD

Lessons from Elijah



2. GOD PROVIDES FOR HIS OWN

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We are all very familiar with how God provided for Daniel in the lions den and his three friends in the fiery furnace. We know how He provided for Abraham, Joseph and David. However we aren't always as aware of how He provided for Elijah. Elijah delivered God's message of coming drought to Ahab (I Kings 17:1), who probably just laughed -- until it was obvious there was a drought. Then, instead of responding to God's warning, he just blamed Elijah for the problem and tried to take it out on him.

GOD'S STRANGE PROVISION When Elijah's life was at risk, God spoke to him (v. 2) and told him to go hide in a cave in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan River (v. 3). As is typical of the way God works, He doesn't change circumstances or remove our problems, but He does help us through them. He never promised to end our troubles, but He always has promised to help us through them (Matthew 28:20; I Cor. 10:13; II Cor, 12:9; etc.). There God showed Elijah a brook that still had water for him to drink. His food, however, was brought in daily by ravens. These were considered unclean by the Jews, but God is showing Elijah that He can and will use anything and anyone for His work -- even fearful Elijah. Depending on these birds to bring food each day must have been very humbling to Elijah, as God meant it to be. Still, Elijah obeyed. Each morning the ravens brought bread and meat in the morning and evening.

What they brought wasn't take-out from a local restaurant! It was their own food which they left behind. They found or stole bread and vegetables. They killed small animals and birds. By God's guidance they left some of this behind for Elijah to cook and eat.

Now put yourself in Elijah's place. He had nothing to do but sit in a barren desert all day. Inactivity for any man, especially for one used to lots of activity and accomplishment, is very hard. There is no clock to punch, no list to cross off work completed. God is using this time to slow Elijah up so He can deepen his faith. Not only does Elijah have nothing to do, he has nothing to think about, and this is even harder for a man. All he has to do is wonder if the birds will make their next drop-off, and what he'll do if they don't! For a man to not be able to provide for himself but to be at the mercy of other's provision is probably hardest of all. Most men would hate having nothing to do but sit around analyzing their thoughts and feelings day after day! We've been trained to value our worth by what we accomplish. We don't seem to accomplish anything we don't feel we have any worth. God, however, was accomplishing something much greater in Elijah than anything Elijah could produce with his hands. God was using this to mature and strengthen his faith.

Elijah was learning that God would provide. God provided for his physical needs when he needed the food. God wasn't early (providing far ahead) or late (after he was sick from hunger). God was always right on time. Elijah needed to learn that, as does every man. God also provided for his emotional needs -- birds to keep him company. They provided some contact with life. He had to avoid people or he could be found out by Ahab and killed. He got to know the birds and their various mannerisms and distinctive habits. They provided companionship. I think that's why God used birds instead of something like manna.

Moses was in a desert for 40 years as God taught him to trust Him moment by moment. Joseph learned that lesson in prison, Paul in Arabia and Jesus in the carpenter shop. God has ways of showing each man that he needs to depend on God moment by moment. We are so independent and self-sufficient that it doesn't come naturally to trust Him. We try to take care of everything on our own. That's why God allows some area we can't control and need Him day by day. It may be health, finances, family difficulties, career stress, time pressures, emotional issues, thoughts we can't control (lust, greed, anger, fear, etc.), but whatever it is God allows it there so we learn to trust Him day by day and moment by moment.

After about a year Elijah started to really learn he could trust God for his daily provision. Then do you know what happened? The water level started to go down, slowly at first. Each day the stream got narrower and narrower until finally it was a trickle. Finally even that stopped and there were just occasional small pools in the deeper sections. It wasn't long until these turned green and rank. This, too, was to increase Elijah's faith. At just the right minute (not too soon and not too late) God again spoke to Elijah (v. 8).

GOD'S STRANGER PROVISION God then moved Elijah on to stage two in his training program. He had to go to a Gentile widow and eat the last of her food (v. 9)! This was even harder on his male ego than being fed by an unclean bird! Still, Elijah obeyed (v. 10-11). As it turned out this Gentile woman was a believer in God (v. 12) and trusted what Elijah told her, sharing the very last of her food (v. 13-15; Philippians 2:3-4). It must have been hard for Elijah to take that, for men would certainly prefer to come to her rescue, bringing food for her. Instead he eats the last of her food. Still, in faith she cooperated. She is very similar to another Gentile woman of faith from this very same area that will one day come to Jesus and be complemented by Him for her great faith (Matthew 15:24f).

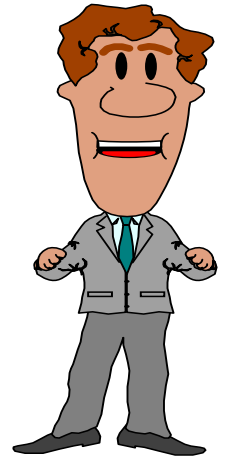
What happened was even more miraculous than the ravens! Each time the last of the flour and oil was used, it was miraculously replaced by the time it was needed for the next day's meal (v. 16)! God again provided daily, as the need arose. If God would have sent Elijah to a large, well-stocked farm and given barrels and barrels of provision ahead, Elijah would not have learned to trust God day by day, moment by moment. That is what God needs to teach us all.

GOD'S STRANGEST PROVISION The story doesn't end here, though. It continues on in your life and mine. We see how God used this to prepare Elijah for the coming work and tests that were in store for him. God is using things in your life and mine now to teach us to depend on Him day by day. Men aren't naturally good at that. We're better at being self-sufficient and independent, taking care of ourself and our loved ones, making sure everything goes smoothly. It hurts our ego to have to trust God, to know there is a part of our lives not going like we'd like it. We may even blame God for allowing that to continue. However it is that very situation that God uses to teach us to continually depend on Him.

Each one of us has our Elijah-story about God's daily provision. What is it in your life? Where do you need to keep trusting God day by day, moment by moment? What is not under your control like you'd like? Are you continually trusting God with it? Or are you blaming Him for allowing it to continue? Are you trying to solve it on your own? Do you feel like a failure because it continues? Trust Him with it, moment by moment, like Elijah did. He'll never let you down. His provision won't be early, but it won't be late! He WILL provide!

GODLY MANHOOD

Lessons from Elijah



3. CRISIS PRAYING

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How many times have you prayed this week? No, I mean how many times have you REALLY PRAYED this week? There is a big difference, you know. When do you do your most sincere, intense, focused praying? If you're like most of the rest of us, its in times of difficulty. There is something about being in a really tough situation that motivates us to pray better. When we are in a crisis, when things are out of control and we are experiencing a high level of discomfort, our focus on prayer increases. Think of times in your life when you were in a real crisis: what did that do to your prayer life? The same thing happened to Elijah, too.

ELIJAH: A MAN OF PRAYER Elijah had been praying for his whole life. He was a great man of prayer. he prayed and God sent a drought for 3 1/2 years (James 5:17). He prayed for housing and food and God provided a brook and ravens, then a widow woman. Now God has greater things for him. God prepares us for big challenges by starting us with smaller ones. We have to pass the smaller ones to get to the larger ones.



ILLNESS STRIKES The context for this stretching of Elijah's faith begins with the son of the woman he is staying with getting ill (I Kings 17:17). Despite his prayers, the boy gradually gets worse until he dies! Before Elijah had been watching a stream dry up and die a slow death. Now it is watching a boy die a slow death. God provided when the stream died -- what about the boy?

THE WIDOW'S RESPONSE When the boy died the widow responded by blaming Elijah. "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and mill my son?" How do you respond when you are blamed for something you didn't do? Usually we defend ourselves and attack back, pointing out imperfections in the other person. Her first reaction is "Whose fault is it?" "Is it judgment because of past sin?" Like with Job, we assume difficulties come to us because God is punishing us for sin. This can never be (Romans 8:1).



ELIJAH'S RESPONSE How do you think this made Elijah feel? Everywhere he goes disaster follows. Drought comes to the land, then his brook dries up, now the son of the woman providing for him dies. We know Elijah had a tendency to pity himself and get depressed (I Kings 19:1-4). These were perfect circumstances for

Elijah to feel sorry for himself and start blaming God. Men today, too, must watch out for that -- it's sin! Elijah took this all to God in prayer, though. That's the only thing we can do!

A CRISIS PRAYER Elijah took the boy to his room and poured his heart out to God in a loud, emotional cry: "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" "Why did you do this, God?" is what he prays. This may not be a great example of faith and trust. It doesn't show a submissive servant spirit, does it? It is an honest pouring out of the frustration and confusion, anger and wondering that is going on in him. He just doesn't understand why God is doing this, and God doesn't tell him a thing!

Then Elijah lay on top of the boy face to face, hands to hands. He cried out to God: "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!" Nothing happened, so he did it again. Suppose he would have stopped then. I wonder how many blessings God has prepared for us, but we don't persevere in prayer and therefore don't receive them. After doing this for the third time God brought the boy back to life! God answered Elijah's crisis prayer. Why? Because it was theologically profound? It wasn't. Because of his deep faith? It wasn't. His prayer was just an honest, to-the-point turning to God in need. God understood Elijah's frustration and anxieties, fears and shortcomings. That should make any man feel great!

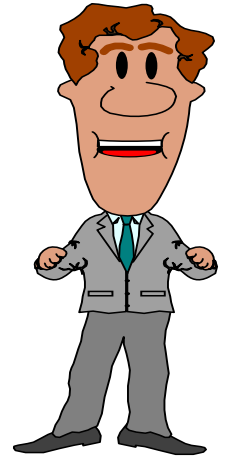
God doesn't expect long, flowery prayers of praise and deep theology during times of crisis. All He wants is honesty. Elijah prayed like a typical man: direct and right to the point. That's OK. That's how most of Jesus' prayers were, too.



WHY? Why did God allow this to happen to Elijah and the widow? He could have prevented it, why didn't He? God always has good reasons for allowing these things: reasons that have to do with our growth and His glory. The widow needed this to realize that Elijah was a man of God (I Kings 17:24). Elijah needed this to see God's power and the importance of prayer. We need crisis situations to focus our prayer, become more intense and sincere. These are elements we should carry over into our prayer life at all times. God allows crisis situations to help us learn crisis praying. The next crisis you face, remember Elijah and pray!

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4. MEN OF INTEGRITY

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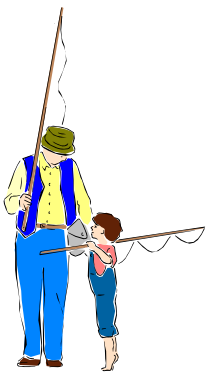
In ancient China, the people desired security from the barbaric hordes to the north; so they built the great Chinese wall. It was so high they knew no one could climb over it and so thick that nothing could break it down. They settled back to enjoy their security. During the first hundred years of the wall's existence, China was invaded three times. Not once did the barbaric hordes break down the wall or climb over the top. Each time they bribed a gatekeeper and then marched right through the gates. The Chinese were so busy relying upon the walls of stone that they forgot to teach integrity to their children.

Unfortunately the same is true today. Too often selfish personal goals come before anything else in life. Honesty of character is no longer admired as it was in Abe Lincoln's day. Lawyers, politicians, used car salesmen and many others have reputations as being self-serving and not always to be trusted. This isn't isolated in a few professions, though. Retail loss from employee theft is almost twice that from shop lifting, and shoplifting itself is quite high! In addition, statistics show most high school students admit they would cheat on an important exam. Integrity, honesty, character - these today are not what they should be.

Good examples of men of integrity are often hard to find today. The Bible has numerous ones, though: Nehemiah, Daniel, Joseph, Obadiah and many others. Surprised to see Obadiah's name there? Are you wondering what he did that was so great? Well, the Obadiah I am talking about isn't the one who wrote the book by that name. The one I'm referring to was a contemporary of Elijah. Let's call him Obadiah # 2. His story is in I Kings 18.

ELIJAH RETURNS TO AHAB After two years with the widow, being prepared by God for what has for him next, God tells him to return to Ahab and deliver another message (I Kings 18:1). Even though the word was out to have Elijah shot on sight because he was the most wanted man in Israel, he obeys without an "if," "but," or "later." Men of integrity do what God wants them to do, no matter what the personal cost. If it means losing a promotion, looking bad in front of others, taking a financial loss, going against the wishes of wife and/or children, or having others think less of you, men of integrity do what Jesus would do in a situation.

MEET OBADIAH # 2 Obadiah was in charge of Ahab's palace (v. 3), a very influential position. In addition, he was a very devout believer in the Lord (v. 3). God always had his people in strategic positions just at the right time to do His will: Joseph and Moses in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and Nehemiah & Esther in Assyria. Still, it takes a very committed believer to come through when God needs Him. It takes a man of character, of integrity, to obey God and do what is right no matter what the consequences.



The job God had for Obadiah was to, at the risk of his own life, to hide and feed 100 of God's prophets for Jezebel was killing all she could find (v. 4).

OBEDIAH MEETS ELIJAH One day Ahab sent out Obadiah to help find food for his horses and mules (v. 5). He was obviously more concerned about how the drought would affect his own possessions than he was about the people for whom he was responsible! Men of character put the needs of others before their own comfort and 'things.' Ahab has never been accused of being a man of character!

Anyway, Obadiah met up with Elijah who was on his way to see Ahab (v. 6-7). It must have been encouraging and uplifting for these two believers to find the other was all right and to be able to talk about the things of God with another person. That didn't last long, though, until Elijah told Obadiah to go tell Ahab that Elijah was here (v. 8). Obadiah fell apart in fear at this (v. 9) for Ahab had spread the word that anyone who saw Elijah and didn't bring him in was as good as dead! After all he had done for God and to hide the 100 prophets, now he feels God is deserting him and sending him to his destruction (v. 10-14).

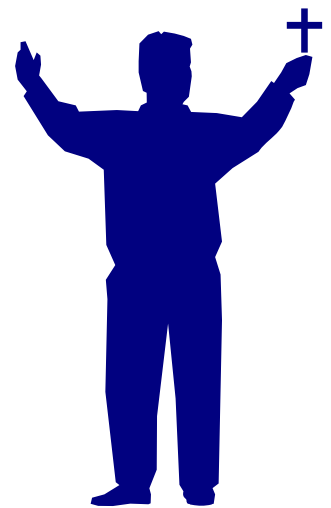
Elijah understood, for his life was in even more danger. He assured Obadiah it would be all right for him because Elijah would come turn himself this very same day (v. 15). As a result Obadiah passed on the message and Ahab went to meet Elijah (v. 16).

MEN OF INTEGRITY It takes integrity to do the right thing when there is chance of pain or loss because of it. It takes integrity to obey God when it will cost us something. Integrity means doing what is right, what God wants you to do, what Jesus would do -- no matter the consequences. Integrity means being faithful to your wife in every action and thought, no matter how your marriage is going. Integrity means you faithfully minister for Jesus in whatever capacity he has given you, regardless of the results or response. Integrity means you keep your promises to family and friends. Integrity means that all your business, financial and personal dealings and thoughts are pure and righteous.

The words that house speaker, Jim Wright, quoted upon his resignation, really hit home; Horace Greeley had a quote that Harry Truman used to like: "Fame is a vapor, popularity an accident, riches take wings, those who cheer today may curse tomorrow, only one thing endures -- character."

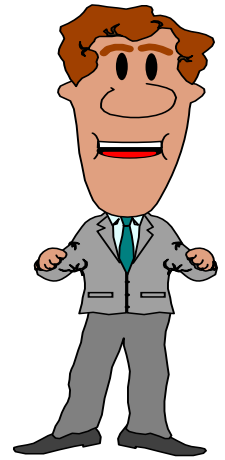
Integrity means you are "sincere" in all you do. You see, the word "sincere" comes from two Latin words meaning "without wax." Artificers of Middle Eastern countries fashioned highly expensive statuettes out of a very fine porcelain. It was of such fragile nature that extreme care had to be taken when firing the figurines to keep them from cracking. Dishonest dealers would accept the cracked figurines at a much lower price and then fill the cracks with wax before offering them for sale. But honest merchants would display their uncracked porcelain wares with signs that read, "sine cera," "without wax."

God has YOU in a strategic position, to reach some that no one else is in position to reach. Don't respond in fear, like Obadiah did at first. Overcome that fear with faith. Trust God and obey by doing what you know he wants you to do, whatever the price. Become men of integrity. The world needs that. God needs that. Your family needs that.



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5. AVOIDING RATIONALIZATION

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Adam blamed Eve for his sin. Eve blamed the serpent for hers. Aaron blamed the fire for making the golden calf. Saul blamed his soldiers when he didn't kill all the Amalekites. Pilate blamed the Jews for his not releasing Jesus. It seems blaming someone else has been around since the beginning. Everyone today has an excuse for their failure, a justification for their sin, a rationalization for their errors. From little on we perfect the skill of explaining away our wrong actions and putting the blame on someone else. Siblings, parents, the boss at work, our mate, even God gets blamed -- just so we don't have to admit to our own sin. What motivates us to always make excuses? What's behind this compulsion?

AHAB BLAMES ELIJAH When Obadiah brought Ahab to Elijah, Ahab's first response was to blame Elijah for the 3-year drought in the land (I Kings 18:16-17). Now Ahab was the one who brought God's warning that Israel's sin (idolatry, immorality, greed, etc.) would result in God's judgment, a drought, to motivate the people to turn back to God. As king, Ahab was responsible for the people, especially since he and his wife Jezebel were the ones responsible for turning them from God. But instead accepting responsibility for the drought, he blamed Elijah! It's always easier to blame someone or something else, isn't it? Children do it, women do it, men do it. It's more dangerous when men do it, though, because men are responsible not only for their own actions but for their families and churches. Like Ahab, though, we look to place blame elsewhere. We don't like it when we are blamed for something, but we are still quick to find a way to pass responsibility for a sin or error to someone else.

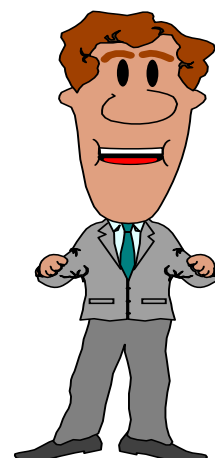
ELIJAH RESPONDS TO AHAB How do you respond when blamed for something? Elijah handled it like a man. He coolly pointed out the facts, that it wasn't his fault (I Kings 18:18-21). He told Ahab to take responsibility for his own sin.

WHY WE BLAME OTHERS Why is it so hard to hold ourselves accountable, to admit our mistakes? I think it's our pride. We feel we must be perfect, always right. If we aren't we think less of ourselves and feel others do, too. We grow up thinking we must be perfect, we fear the consequences of sin, so we deny responsibility. We aren't secure enough ('man' enough) to admit our failures and shortcomings, to say we are sorry and ask for forgiveness. We can't love ourselves when we do that and we think others can't, either. Inside we feel guilty, knowing this isn't right, but that just seems to drive us to pass the hurt on by hurting others. We're like little boys who got caught and are afraid to admit it. What a terrible, destructive habit this becomes! It hurts us and those we love. It keeps us from maturing and being like Jesus. Men, PLEASE honestly admit your problem with this. Analyze what causes you to do it. Confess it to God and

those you hurt. Ask God to search you and remove that from you (Psalm 139:23-24). It's a bondage Jesus can help you break if you admit the problem and go to Him for help!

GODLY MANHOOD

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6. COURAGE TO SPEAK UP FOR GOD

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Real life stories are always more exciting than fiction. One of the most exciting events of all time was the showdown between Baal and Yahweh on Mount Carmel almost three thousand years ago. It certainly goes down in history as one of the classic confrontations of all time. More exciting than any Superbowl, more important than any political event, more far-reaching than any UN debate, and more conclusive than any military victory, it is certainly an outstanding event. What made it so important was that God's people were trying to serve Baal and Yahweh. They wouldn't choose one or the other. This victory caused them to choose God. The story is found in I Kings 18.

THE STAGE IS SET When Elijah challenged Ahab to a showdown to see whose god was more powerful the stage was set I Kings 18:19). Thousands of people came for they were starving during the drought and blamed Elijah (v. 20). Mount Carmel was the perfect stage: high enough to be seen by all yet with slopes gradual enough for all to get close.

Baal was the farm and storm god whose voice was thunder. Yet he couldn't get crops to grow or bring rain in 3 1/2 years. Asherah was the goddess of sex and war. The European goddess of fertility, Easter, is the same as Asherah. Jezebel brought her worship into Israel, for her father was a priest of Asherah. Both were worshipped by awful, immoral orgies of the worst kind. Elijah challenged the people to choose between their God, Yahweh, and the god of their pagan neighbors, Baal. They wanted the best of both. They didn't want to abandon Yahweh but they didn't want to give up Baal and the sexual excesses in his worship, either. Elijah said they must choose, but they remained silent, refusing to commit themselves (v. 21).

THE CONFLICT BEGINS Evidently Jezebel and her 400 prophets didn't show up, ignoring Elijah's challenge, but Ahab and his 450 prophets of Baal did come (22). Elijah passed on the instructions God had given him: get two bulls, sacrifice them on an altar, and let the more powerful god win by sending fire to burn the sacrifice, thus having it ascend to him in smoke and heat (23-24). Elijah let Baal's prophets do the choosing and go first so there wouldn't be any charge of dishonesty against him (25). However, Baal didn't send any fire despite all his priests did (26). Elijah taunted them unmercifully about their god's failure to show up, disrespectfully even implying he couldn't hear them because he was 'out taking a leak' (Hebrew idiom in v. 27). The prophets of Baal cut themselves and tried to get his attention by blood shed. Satan, who is

behind all false gods, is a lover of lust and blood and violence and pain and suffering and death. Still, God wouldn't allow Satan to start Baal's altar on fire (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). That must have frustrated Satan as he saw how the whole event was unfolding.

THE CONFLICT ENDS Then Elijah rebuilt God's altar, which obviously hadn't been used (29-31), probably using the whole time to preach to the people, reminding them about God's power as seen in the Passover, Red Sea crossing, Jericho's fall, sun moving back, etc. When he was done rebuilding the altar, he had huge amounts of water poured on it (32-35) making sure no one would ever accuse him of hiding a spark in it somewhere or cheating in any way.

Then Elijah prayed (36-37), making sure God got the credit and not Elijah, and asking that this would cause the people to take a stand for God and His truth. Immediately fire fell from heaven, burning up the sacrifice, wood, stones, soil and water (38)! This obviously was no trick. There was nothing subtle about this! Fear fell on all the people as they heard the roar and felt the heat, knowing God could have destroyed them with fire for their sin (39). The people did repent and turn back to God, recognizing His greatness (39) and vowing to follow and serve Him and Him alone. The prophets of Baal were killed (40) and the nation turned back to God. What a tremendous even this was!

THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING A STAND There is a clear contrast here between Elijah's taking a courageous stand for God and His truth and the people who stayed silent, refusing to commit themselves one way or another. God wants, needs, expects men to be like Elijah.

While we may not find ourselves in a situation as Elijah was in, there still are plenty of opportunities where we can stand like Elijah or remain silent like the people. At work situations come up where we can either keep quiet or stand for God. Off-color jokes are told -- how should we respond? Something dishonest is suggested or done -- what do we say? Spiritual things are mocked -- what do we do? Someone is criticized or gossiped about -- what is our reaction? Too often we choose the silent way, pretending we don't hear or staying out of it. We don't have to make a scene out of everything, we are to be wise and sensitive in our response, but when God wants us to take a stand we **MUST** do so.

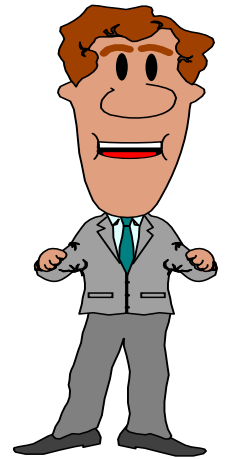
This also happens with relatives who criticize, mock, or just share views that aren't what God would have our children believe. Do we remain silent or take a stand? Lot didn't stand against the evil influences of Sodom and Gomorrah despite it bothering him inside (II Peter 2:7). Joshua did take a stand with his family, and challenged all others to do the same (Joshua 24:15). Each man has to decide which comes first: doing what is right for family and God or what is easiest for self.

Perhaps the hardest place to take this stand is right in one's own family. Too often a man will remain silent and keep his convictions to himself if he thinks his wife or children will get angry or upset with him. From little on up, many boys are trained to fear woman-anger and do all they can to avoid it. Thus they end up being influenced and manipulated by women. Instead of being the leader as God commands (I Timothy 3:3-5) they let have the final say and, as in the case of Eve, end up in disobedience to God (I Timothy 2:12-15). God leads a family through the man, so men must be sensitive to God's leading and courageous enough to lead the family in the direction they feel God wants them to go. Eli let his sons set their path and didn't have the courage to stand up, and the results were disastrous. We can't excuse ourselves by saying our wives are more spiritual, know the Bible better, etc. We often learn from our fathers how to avoid conflict and slip by, in effect letting our wives and even children lead. We claim to be the leaders, but we are careful to do that which they want and which they agree with. When it comes to overruling, saying no, stepping in and taking over a bad situation, or anything like this we often find it very hard to do so. Like the people in Elijah's day, we remain silent. We are always to speak in love, be patient and considerate, and take other's opinions into account. But

remember, men - **The buck stops here!** Pray for courage to always do what God wants and to take a stand when necessary.

GODLY MANHOOD

Lessons from Elijah



7. OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

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There's an old fable that says the Devil once held a sale and offered all the tools of his trade to anyone who would pay their price. They were spread out on the table and each one labeled: hatred, malice, envy, despair, sickness, sensuality -- all the weapons that everyone knows so well. But off to one side lay a harmless looking wood-shaped instrument marked "discouragement." It was old and worn looking but it was priced far above all the rest. When asked the reason why, the Devil replied, "Because I can use this one so much more easily than the others. No one knows that it belongs to me, so with it I can open doors that are tightly bolted against the others. Once I get inside I can then use any tool that suits me best."

If the enemy can't puff you up with pride, he will try to dampen your spirit by discouragement. It's his best tool! Does it work on you? It worked on Job (7:3-11), Moses (Num 11:11-15), Jonah (4:3) and Jeremiah (15:10-18), all who were so depressed they wished they were dead! It also worked on Elijah!

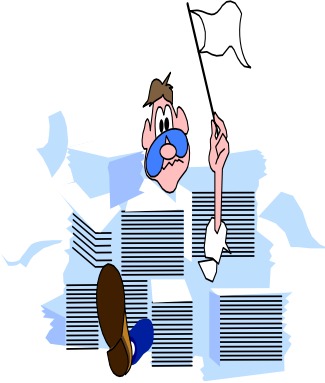
Everything was going great for Elijah: the people had repented, the priests of Baal were killed and the drought was over. He even accompanied Elijah back to town after all this happened (I Kings 18:46). In fact, he ran the whole way (about 20 miles) in a pouring rain. He was helping and encouraging Ahab as he was heading back to tell Jezebel about what happened. Unfortunately it all went downhill from there, resulting with Elijah really depressed.

The **TIME** of Elijah's depression is quite surprising (v. 2-4). He wasn't depressed when fed by a raven or widow, nor when facing Ahab or the prophets of Baal. It wasn't until after it was over, when he experienced an emotional let-down, that he got depressed. Always watch, after every high point in life the only direction is down. If we go by our emotions we'll let our feelings control, as did Elijah. Elijah was drained emotionally and physically from the day's activities -- and that is fertile ground for self pity and depression, especially in introverts like Elijah. At its root, depression is self pity. We feel sorry for ourselves, thinking things are too hard and God isn't fair to us. It is a self-imposed pity party! Elijah is a perfect example:

What **TRIGGERED** his depression was a single threat of a defeated woman. Queen Jezebel said she'd kill him for what happened. She rejected her husband Ahab's lead and refused to repent and turn back to God. Instead she told Elijah she'd have him killed in 24 hours

if he didn't clear out of town (I Kings 19:1-2). She was powerless to carry out this threat because everyone had turned back to God. There was no reason for him to get depressed. The immediate cause of depression seldom is valid. It's just the timing of it more than anything else. At most any other time he would have easily taken this in stride!

Elijah's **TORTURES** were the same as ours (v. 4). He ran away from his friends and responsible, he was disgusted with life and prayed for death, he felt all alone, as if no one cared about him. All that comes from self pity, from going by emotions instead of rationally remembering God is still in sovereign control of everything.



The most important part, though, is God's **TREATMENT** for Elijah. God didn't browbeat him or make him confess his sin. He gently worked with the root problem, the cause of the depression. First, he let him sleep then sent an angel to feed him so he could sleep some more (v. 5-8). That is important when depressed. Our **physical** being must be healthy in order to overcome depression. Proper food, rest and exercise are a must to keep us from giving in to emotions.

Psychologically God let Elijah talk, get it off his chest (v. 9-10), and God just quietly listened. God doesn't argue, try to point out reality, etc. Elijah isn't ready to receive it yet. God patiently lets him get it all off his chest. Then God reveals Himself to Elijah.

Spiritual God revealed Himself to Elijah in a still, small voice (v. 11-15), not in a powerful, supernatural way as Elijah wanted. God was not in the strong wind, earthquake or the fire, but came to him in a still, small voice. It's hard to listen for that when feeling sorry for ourselves, but that is the only way we can get back in touch with God.

Then God gave Elijah work to do (v. 15-17). When depressed stay faithful to your responsibilities. God then explained that Elijah wasn't alone as he thought (v. 18). Knowing we aren't alone is very important. This seemed to help Elijah get out of his depression.

Still, there was always a **TRACE** left, for victory over depression is never permanent. It can always come back. It was something Elijah always had to watch out for.

Final **TRIUMPH** comes only by faith in God and His Word (Rom. 8:28; James 1:2-3; I Cor. 10:13; I Thes. 5:18). Read and memorize this to help.

The hymn God Moves in a Mysterious Way has been a source of great comfort and blessing to many of God's people since William Cowper wrote it in the 18th century. Yet few people know of the unusual circumstances that led to its composition. William Cowper was a Christian, but he had sunk to the depths of despair. One foggy night he called for a horsedrawn carriage and asked to be taken to the London Bridge on the Thames River. He was so overcome by depression that he intended to commit suicide. But after 2 hours of driving through the mist, Cowper's coachman reluctantly confessed that he was lost. Disgusted by the delay, Cowper left the carriage and decided to find the London Bridge on foot. After walking only a short distance, though, he discovered that he was at his own doorstep! The carriage had been going in circles. Immediately he recognized the restraining hand of God in it all. Convicted by the Spirit, he realized that the way out of his troubles was to look to God, not to jump into the river. As he cast his burden on the Savior, his heart was comforted. With gratitude he sat down and penned these reassuring words: "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm. O fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head."

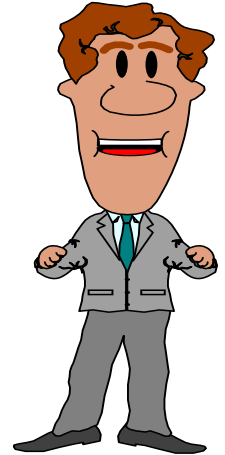
Remember Elijah and learn from him about how to avoid and defeat depression. True and lasting victory can and will only come by trusting completely in Him, no matter what.

GODLY MANHOOD

Lessons from Elijah

8. MEN NEED FRIENDS

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Male friendships are rare. David & Jonathan come to mind, but very few others. Jesus was close to His disciples, and Paul had a good friendship with Mark and Timothy. Still, good male friendships are very rare. Perhaps that is one of the reasons so many men are struggling today. Men need friends. God made them that way.

When Elijah got over his depression, with God's help (I Kings 19:1-18), God made a provision to help keep that from happening again. God provided Elisha at this time in his life (v. 19-21). Elisha stayed with Elijah for the rest of his life, being with him at his death (II Kings 2:1-4). Not surprisingly, no severe bouts of depression are recorded in Elijah's life again.

Men have a deep-seated need for friends, but there are many difficulties in men initiating and cultivating personal relationships. I must admit I don't have any close male friends. All my best friends (those I share personal and intimate things with) have been girls. I grew up in an all-woman world and so felt more comfortable and accepted by women. My sister Judy, my cousin Mary Jane, my friend from church Linda, and friends of recent years like Nancy Kremm and my wife Nancy, all are female friends.

I never learned how to make close friendships with men. We can work on a project together and enjoy each other's company. We can joke, play softball, discuss the Eagles, or many other things. But talk about my feelings and fears? Express my appreciation for and need of him as a friend? Share my failures and hurts and tears? Suppose I called one of the men in my church that I feel comfortable with and asked him to meet me for lunch one day because I miss his company and would like to spend more time with him than I have been doing? How would that go over? See what I mean. Now suppose I ask him to meet me for lunch so we can go over some long-range planning for church programs or some such thing and there would be no problem! This proves my point -- men's relationships are utilitarian, always serving some function or purpose. They aren't just for the joy of each other's company.

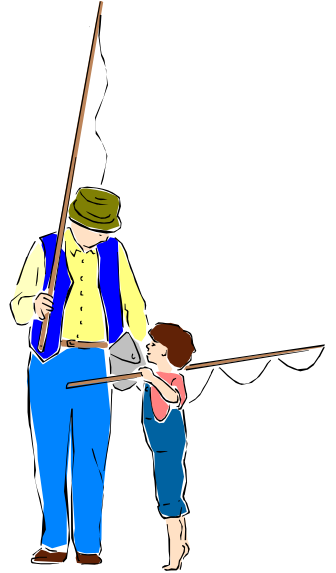


For men, friendships either just happen or they don't. If they don't fall in place men usually don't work at developing or pursuing them. Men just don't know how to do that without feeling (or thinking they are perceived as) gay, unmasculine, or just somehow different. Men work at hiding their real emotions, especially from other men. Men don't make

commitments to each other. That's why relationships like David and Jonathan stand out so strongly. Gale Sayers and Brian Piccolo in "Brian's Song" is another exception that proves the rule. Apart from a few examples like there, men have no role models of how to develop male friendships. My son, Tim, from when he was young, always said he liked to have girl friends because with boys he always felt like he had to compete with them in some way. I don't know where that comes from in men, or how to get rid of it, but it is a fact of life.

For another thing, men don't admit their problems to other men. I counsel many times more women than men. Men don't ask advice, even when lost while driving. It is "unmanly" to turn to others for help.

Is this lack of male friendship so bad, though? Why should a man bother having a male friend if he has a wife? Is anything lost by men not having a male friend? I think so. Even Jesus needed and cultivated male friendships. He had the 12 whom He invited to live and work with Him 24 hours a day. From them He had 3 specially close friends (Peter, James and John) to enjoy an even deeper level of intimacy (sharing the Transfiguration, etc.). Even closer to His heart yet was John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Jesus leaned on his chest during the Last Supper. (It is an unwritten rule today that men never touch other men outside of carefully understood gestures like handshakes, slap on the back, playful arm punch, etc.) Jesus needed them with Him, and wanted them praying with Him as He went to Gethsemane. It wasn't just because He wasn't married. A good male friend can be someone you can bounce things off of you can't bounce off your wife (sexual temptations, feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure, frustrations and hurts from your wife, stress of work, etc.). I think there is a place for close male friendships today. We all know that widows adjust to life much better than widowers, and I think this is one reason why.



Could this be why so many, many more men than women become workaholics, alcoholics, drug addicts, etc.? I'm sure its one of the reasons women have a much easier time witnessing to other women than men have witnessing to men. If we don't develop relationships with other men how can we help reach them for Christ and help them grow spiritually? Is this why Christian manhood is often so much weaker than Christian womanhood today? I don't know the answers to all these things. I don't even know if there are answers. I do know, though, that this is an area worth considering. Its not easy being a man. Its harder being a man alone. Satan's strategy is divide and conquer, and I think he's done that pretty well with men. I'm not the only one he's done it with. It doesn't have to stay that way, though.

Jesus is our example in this area as in all others. He had friends. He picked twelve special men to spend all their time with him. From among these he was extra close to Peter, James and John, the inner 3. It seems He was closest of all, though, to John. John leaned against Him during the last supper (men never touch men today, except for a handshake or slap on the back). Jesus needed His friends to pray for Him in Gethsemane. Although they let Him down, He still reached out to them. If Jesus needed friends, so do we. If Jesus could have friends, so can we. Follow Jesus example and

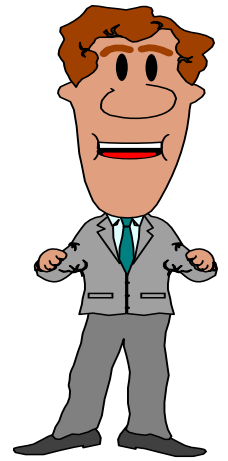


GODLY MANHOOD

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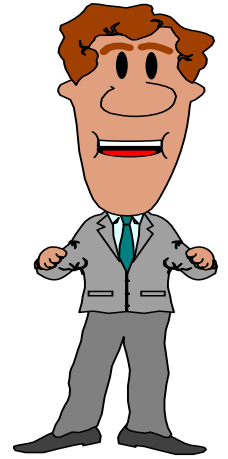
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What is the hardest decision you have ever made? Which decisions still give you the most trouble? Why?



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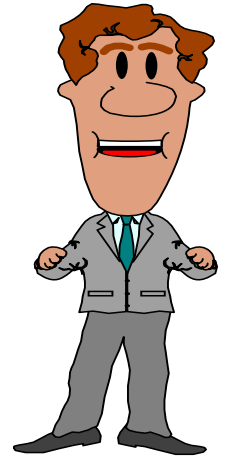
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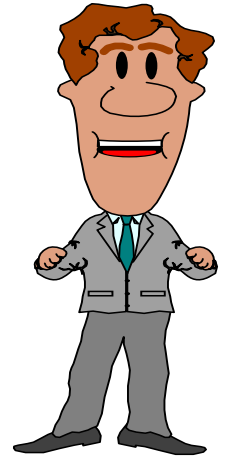
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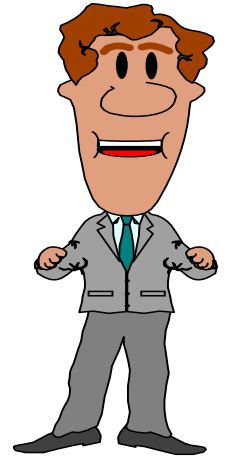
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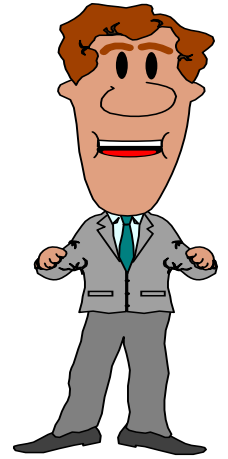
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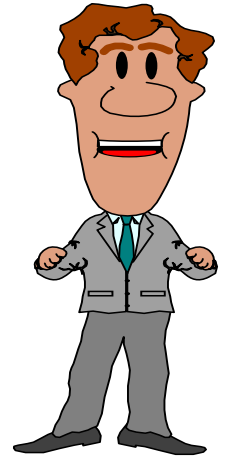
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