

St. Paul:

Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 08.16.15 (Pentecost 12b)*

Day One: 1 Kings 19:1-8

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." ³ Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

Queen Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah. Have you ever gotten a letter from someone important?

I used to write an occasional letter to the president. And I'd be excited to receive a reply, maybe a month or two later, on genuine Whitehouse stationery! But after a while the thrill wore off when I

learned that the replies were never more than form letters.

Soon I got old enough to pay taxes, and I discovered that a letter from the government can have another whole set of meanings. They can even be alarming... unless you know that you are in the right. Your advocate (the tax preparer or attorney) will make sure that you're OK.

Elijah got a message from the queen and he was afraid. But wait! Wasn't Elijah himself a messenger of God? Hadn't Elijah just delivered a powerful message to the king?

Paul faced a similar situation. He says (2Cor12) that he received a thorn in the flesh, a "messenger of Satan" to torment him. But he also received a message from Jesus, "My grace is enough for you."

Did you get a message today? Did Satan, or some messenger, deliver bad news? It's time to check your mail. Open God's word and see what he has to say!

Prayer: *Father, it was great to hear from you, reminding me of how you have defended my brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you for writing, and for sending your messengers. Amen.*

Day Two: 1 Kings 19:1-8

And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat."⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again.⁷ And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you."⁸ And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

Elijah has run away because of the threats he received from Jezebel. He has laid down under a tree, and he has asked God to let him die.

"It is enough," Elijah said. "O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

Does that sound familiar? Maybe you haven't asked God to end your life, but I'll bet you've said at least that first phrase, "it is enough." I've had my fill. I can't take any more. I've gone as far as I can go. I've done everything that could be done. God can't ask any more of me.

My sickness has lasted too long. I cannot take one more day of depression. If I get one

more piece of bad news, I swear I will...

And then God's angel comes and gives Elijah a bit of bread and water, and Elijah goes on. He gains new strength and he goes on.

Maybe that seems unfair, or even unkind. Shouldn't God deliver his faithful servant from trouble and reward him with rest and refreshment? But instead, he gives him enough strength to journey to the mountain where he will talk with God, and there he will receive a new ministry and learn of God's proper plan for his "retirement."

In God's own time Elijah will be called to heaven. In God's own time another will take up the mantle of the prophet. When God is ready his plan will be fulfilled. And until then... God will provide the strength.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, send your messenger to strengthen me. Give me a morsel to eat and a drink to refresh, not so that all my problems may be solved, but so that I may patiently listen to you and receive your word of encouragement. Keep me until your plan for me is revealed. Amen.*

Day Three: Proverbs 9:1-10

[Wisdom says,] “Let all who are simple come in here! ...Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and live; walk in the way of understanding.”

Our world is getting more and more complicated. With the invention of computers, internet, cell phones, and wi-fi, we are dealing with problems and questions we never faced before. Soon we will add self-driving cars, quantum computers, and more and more cloud connected life. Do you sometimes long for a simpler life?

The word “simple” is surprisingly complex. My dictionary offers 13 separate definitions! It’s not until #11 that we get to the meaning used in this verse, “having little sense or intellect.” We tend to think that foolishness can be cured with education, or that ignorance just needs information. As a result we make life more complicated by adding more information.

But God offers us greater understanding, not more complexity. He urges us to go deeper, not just to have more. God’s wisdom is also “simple”

in another sense. It is composed of one thing, easy, without embellishment, humble, and not deceitful. It is simple trust in Him.

So Elijah could have wanted more power, more followers, more authority, more answers, more or better words to speak, more miracles. He wanted God to provide some plan to overcome the complicated set of enemies that faced him – Ahab and Jezebel, the unfaithful Israelites, the wicked Philistines, the prophets of Baal and Asherah.

Instead, God said that he would give him a partner and successor, Elisha. And he would allow Elijah to anoint the next king. And he still had many believers unknown to the discouraged prophet.

God’s plan is not complex – it is complete. It is not just profound – it is perfect. God’s plan for your life will work, not because you understand it, but because he will do it.

Prayer: *Father, sometimes I make things too complicated. I come up with many foolish reasons and excuses for going my own way. Give me simple wisdom, simple faith in Jesus whom you sent for me. Amen.*

Day Four: John 6:51-69

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Jesus offered his hearers the Bread of Life. He told them that his words were spirit and life. But many of them were offended, and even “many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”

They would have liked a more complicated answer to their problems, a political or religious scheme. But Jesus offers them himself instead.

Peter responds, Where else can we go? “You have the words of eternal life.”

Where else have you gone? To what other things have you turned besides Jesus? How have you complicated your life?

When we pray for God’s help, we bring to him the mess that is our fractured family, divisions and battles that often extend over generations. We pray for God’s help with our debt, a problem that has metastasized so that it’s no longer just a credit card bill, but now it’s debt collectors, utility cut-off, the threat of

losing our home, the loss of our car and maybe our job. When we pray for God’s help with our health, it might be more than just a disease, but all the things that have broken because of it – our marriage, our work, our spirit.

Our problems never seem simple to us. As one of our hymns prays, “If worldly pressures fray the mind, and love itself cannot unwind its tangle skein of care: our inward life repair.”

Peter recognized that the solutions of the world were a dead end, but following Jesus was a path that would lead to real life. And Jesus offered something simple, the Bread of Life. “Eat this and you will live.”

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I’ve trusted in schemes and plans, in earthly purchases and guarantees. None of them made me happy. None have lasted. Lord, wash away my complexity, and give me simple trust in you. Amen.*

These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at stpaulannarbor.org