

Listen for the Still Small Voice

1 Kings 19:9-18 (NIV)

⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁰ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” ¹¹ The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁴ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” ¹⁵ The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷ Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸ Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

“The squeaky wheel gets the grease.” It’s an expression that means if you constantly make noise, you will be attended to more quickly while maybe the others who are not making any noise don’t get any attention. We live in a world where so many things are screaming for our attention, and maybe we are even doing a little screaming of our own to be heard and get things done.

Elijah may not have been actually screaming, but he was making noise to be heard by the LORD. After successful confronting and vanquishing over 800 false prophets of Baal and Asherah on the top of Mount Carmel and then ending the 3 ½ year drought, Queen Jezebel sworn an oath to have Elijah killed. While he should have been celebrating a victory for the LORD, Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. He prayed, maybe even screamed, out of depression over his mission and his loneliness, “I have had enough, LORD. Take my life.” (1 Kings 19:4c) Maybe so that his scream would be better heard, Elijah traveled to Horeb, the mountain of God, the same place where the LORD gave to Moses the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments.

It is here on Horeb that the LORD appeared to Elijah. The word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (verse 9b) The squeaky wheel responds, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” (verse 10) It’s all been for nothing, God.

Have you ever felt like Elijah? I can’t claim that I have had someone swear to murder me and then hunt me down because I am a prophet of the LORD, but I can relate with the depression of feeling like sharing and proclaiming God’s Word has returned empty. I have watched people come to worship here, see them come back, to then one day they just stop coming. I reach out but nothing. I have felt the loneliness of standing on the convictions of God’s Word when I share what I believe to be the most important and greatest message anyone could ever know only to have it politely dismissed and disregarded. Many, if not all, of us know what it is to be the minority faith – at work, in our neighborhoods, sometimes even in our own homes. Maybe you feel the loneliness when tell your family and friends about the LORD and peace and comfort and certainty that he brings you but they don’t come worship with you. They politely listen, but then move the conversation on to something else or politely disagree. The depression comes when you spent countless hours bringing your child to Sunday School, teaching them God’s Word at home, and now they refuse it. Did God’s Word just fall flat without changing a heart? And we may scream to the LORD out of our depression and loneliness.

Elijah’s screams, his squeaks, were heard. The LORD knew he needed to be picked up. The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” (verse 10a) A tornado force wind tore the mountains apart. The earth trembled and quaked. Fire burned with searing intensity. But the LORD was not in any of these. Then came a gentle whisper, a still small voice. That voice was the LORD passing by Elijah.

Maybe Elijah would have preferred the LORD to pass by him as one of those powerful forces of nature, for the LORD to come in power and vengeance and smite all his enemies. Maybe at the very least get them to stop trying to kill him. Maybe we want the same things. Maybe we want the LORD to show us his power, to come very specially to me, maybe in some sort of direct revelation

that no one else has. I want the big, drastic, showy signs. Make something happen, LORD! But the LORD comes to Elijah and us in a still small voice. He simply talks to us. Leaves his Word for us to listen to him.

Honestly, that's a good thing. We wouldn't be able to stand up to a tornado like force wind or an earthquake or a blazing fire. If the LORD comes to me in these things, I will not survive the encounter. I will be laid to waste. So, the LORD uses a gentle whisper.

That still small voice has a powerful impact. Teachers know a trick that sometimes when the class is being loud and disruptive, instead of shouting over them, you just get really quiet. The students start to notice and wonder why you aren't saying anything, and they wonder to the point where they stop talking and pay attention. Maybe this is why the LORD came with a still small voice.

The gentle whisper told Elijah that he had work to do, gave him a mission and a purpose. He was to anoint three people who would carry out the LORD's work, including Elisha who would take Elijah's place as prophet to Israel. He assured Elijah that wicked people would not walk away scot-free but would be punished. God and his will would not be thwarted by evil people who try to silence his Word, his prophets. And the LORD revealed to Elijah something he didn't know: that there were 7000 in Israel who were faithful to him, who hadn't been corrupted by all the idol worship that he had been combating. The still small voice of the LORD cut through a world of screams and lifted Elijah up.

The LORD comes to us and is here with us in a still small voice, in simple black on white pages of the Bible. That still small voice is whispers in baptism that you are a part of God's family "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It whispers to you while you eat and drink the bread and the wine that you are forgiven and at peace with God. His still small voice tells us that we are not alone. This is something we need a gentle reminder of since we don't see everyone at every worship service – whether we come in person or worship via livestream. God tells us in a still small voice that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, than our local congregation, that we, like Elijah, belong to a family of believers that is united around the world as well as with the saints up in heaven, millions, billions and more of Christians like you. The Lord's gentle whisper also tells us that sin will not go unpunished. Evil will not triumph over him. His Word will not be silenced. At the same time, he tells us in that still small voice that our sins have been punished on Jesus. He has taken them away. This is what has united us with all those other believers. The Gospel, this good news that God has already taken away your sins and covered you with his perfection, this is what joins us all together and it came to you in a still small voice.

We can bring that same still small voice of the LORD to others. I highly doubt that someone yelling at you is what brought you to God. Maybe it did. But we know that the LORD is here and still uses a still small voice. And so we use the same still small voice in our conversations. Despite our depression or loneliness, we don't yell at our family member when they tell us that they don't want to go to church with us. We don't punch the friend who stopped going to church. It's those quiet moments we have with them when they may actually listen to us instead of us trying to scream it out of our throats and down theirs. Do we make our LORD known in the way that he does and did for Elijah?

A gentle whisper can be drown out in a world of everything screaming for your attention or even in our screams of depression and loneliness. You probably have people screaming for your attention nearly every minute of every day. You have your own desires screaming at you to take time to do things that you enjoy, to relax and take it easy. So, you need to block out the screams. How do we do that? Find or make those moments to listen to the LORD's still small voice. Make a plan and carry it out to wake up 5 minutes earlier to find that time or stay up 5 minutes later to read a devotion out of Meditations or watch a Time of Grace video. If you are worshiping at home online, try to make it as much as church as possible. Close the other tabs on the laptop or tablet. Keep the phone off or at least silenced. I know you may like worshiping in your pajamas, but what if you got ready like you would if you were here in person? Would that help you focus and listen to the LORD's gentle whisper? What can we do to block out the screams of life in order to the LORD's still small voice?

Like he did for Elijah, the LORD speaks to you and me in a gentle whisper. He uses his still small voice to combat our loneliness and our depression over those who hearts do not change with his Word. He tells us to keep sharing his still small voice because we are not alone, because his gentle whisper will prevail against the screams. Yeah, the squeaky wheel, the scream, often gets our attention. The world works that way, but that's not God's default setting in dealing with us. We are not of the world. We belong to God. And so we block out the squeaky wheel, the screams, and listen to God's Word, his still small voice, which lifts us up and keeps us going. Amen.