

## A Still, Small Voice 1 Kings 19:11-13



**Key Concept:** This story of Elijah offers us encouragement to “keep on keeping on,” because God is present in all things.

**Suggested Prayer:** Pray that we may be honest with ourselves, and pray for humbleness before others so that we may see God at work!

**This Study’s Goal:** This study follows a simple structure based on the above text. I hope that by revisiting this well-known story of God’s word, new nuggets of truth become revealed to you. We are promised that “*the word of God does not return void,*” so as you read this study and the central passage, seek to find what God is saying to you as an individual and to your group. God’s work is being done, His purposes are being fulfilled, and we are only instruments in His mighty, powerful hands. When we need to seek His presence, He might be closer than we think.

*Leader: If a group is using this study, there are some instructions for the study leader italicized and/or in parentheses. These instructions should help facilitate the flow of the study.*

### Planting

*(Leader may read this as an introduction)*

How awesome is our GOD! Have you ever been in a situation where you were completely astounded by God’s amazing power? I say astounded because if you are anything like I am, we tend to accept a power “ceiling” (a limit) based on the ordinary experiences of our faith. In some circles the biggest displays of the Spirit’s power are measured in some unusual display of emotion or unprecedented act of kindness. You may have heard the after church service buzz, “Oh, the Spirit was really moving today; did you notice how everyone was crying?” Or even, “I sure know the Spirit of God is with that minister because our giving has increased since he came to our church,” proudly spoken by the church treasurer. Nevertheless, the movement of God in our midst is real and powerful even when undetectable.

Honestly speaking, the average Christian today is not very seasoned in experiences such as the ones described in the first book of Kings in the account of Elijah’s dealings as one of Israel’s prophets. Even in the midst of God’s awesome display of power, we find in this text a fairly ordinary picture of “human burnout.” What Elijah seems to be left with, after all is said and done is a desperate search for GOD. “And where is He?” you might ask.

### Tending

*(Leader may read this paragraph or request a volunteer read it)*

I personally know, as a preacher’s kid and a preacher’s wife for 37 combined years, that Elijah-like power does not come around often. Yet, the God who Elijah served and the God we serve today is the same. And God still moves in unexpected ways.

We come to the beginning of chapter 19 and we find Elijah exhausted; he had been working very hard for the Lord. His burnout was understandable. He hadn’t just been mowing and sprinkling

the church lawn or helping the preacher distribute bulletin inserts against our country's political woes. In previous chapters we can read how he took on the prophets of Baal (450 of them!) and won. Imagine, single-handedly taking on pagan extremists who were contaminating the people of God? He prayed fire from heaven, and prophesied the break of a long drought, demonstrating that the Lord is the only God who responds to humanity. In his zeal he even killed the false prophets before they could continue to corrupt the people of God. Jezebel now threatened his life and he was on the run! Now, this sounds like a rough day in kingdom work, wouldn't you say? Yet, Elijah was very much like you and I. He had to retreat. At the end of his awesome experiences (even being miraculously fed) he spent 40 days and 40 nights in the desert. His experiences had left him feeling alone, with great fear, with loss of perspective, and hopelessness; forgetting the power of the One he served.

*A few pointers about leading this next section of the study:*

- ✦ *The following inductive questions should be asked, giving enough time for participants to look up the verses.*
- ✦ *Leaders should not fear silence, and preferably should not answer the questions.*
- ✦ *If the participants' answers are close to the text, use them; if not, ask someone to read the verse again.*
- ✦ *Don't correct the participants' responses. Instead, you may say "Well, let's read the question again," or "Could someone read the verse again?"*
- ✦ *Please don't simply read the questions and answers, as this takes away from the discovery of God's message to each person. The questions are there to build reaction and interaction.*
- ✦ *After the participants' responses you may share the answers as you have studied them, and as suggested.*

1) In response to Elijah's first hopeless assessment of his situation, what was God's direct command to Elijah? (**v. 10-11a**)

The Lord said, "*God out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.*" The Lord ordered him to stand in the presence of the Holy One, for He is coming by. Get up on your feet, be ready and watch. Imagine how wonderful it would be to say to God, "I am disgusted," and like a best friend who just heard that statement on the other end of the phone, God says, "I will be right over."

2) What natural demonstrations of power occurred when Elijah waited for God to "pass by?" (**v. 11-b-12**)

The great, powerful wind, the earthquake, and the fire had previously been signs of God and God's presence. This passage clearly does not discount those occurrences. Yet, in this passage of scriptures it is stated in each of those instances of natural occurrences, "*God was not in it.*" God was moving differently! It is clear that God was acting, even in the powerful displays of nature. (I don't believe it was a coincidence that the strong wind, earthquake, and fire happened to occur right at that moment, do you?) However, God wanted Elijah to see Him further.

3) Which occurrence was the physical sign that God was present? (**v. 12b**)

It was too loud and chaotic for Elijah. He had seen too much, heard too much, and been through too much! He needed something much more precious than God's overwhelming power. He

needed His personal touch, His whisper. It was not only how He said it, but also what He said in His gentle way. We are told that Elijah covered his face. He knew he was now in God's presence. *"His sheep hear His voice."*

4) What did God quietly ask Elijah? (v. 13b)

*"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* the voice asked. It was Elijah's turn to talk to God, not on behalf of the people, not on behalf of the greater purposes of his prophetic ministry. It was his turn to tell God what he thought he needed. Yet, did Elijah really know his needs and why he was so discouraged? God was inclining His ear to hear what Elijah needed to say. Interestingly, Elijah's complaint is listed twice in this passage. It introduces his interaction with God. And it is restated once he follows God's directive to get out of the cave. It is difficult to know if the sequence of events is chronological, or if there is a recapping of the story with the added information about the wind, earthquake, fire, and small voice. Nevertheless, God speaks. Elijah hears. So, now that he hears and feels God and honors God (notice he covered his face in recognition of God's presence), he still has a complaint.

5) What was the gist of Elijah's complaint? (v. 14)

Basically, I have zeal, others don't and now I am the one being persecuted. Sound familiar?

6) What response did God have that addressed Elijah's real concerns?

*"You are not dead yet. I still have work for you. Go and anoint a new king over Israel (Jehu). Also, anoint Elisha as your successor. Both of them will continue **my** work of purification of Israel from Baal worship with the same zeal and intolerance as you."*

7) How did God address Elijah's unfounded worries? (v. 15)

The Lord spoke quite simply. *"I am the one at work in people's hearts and lives and I have reserved 7,000 who have not given in to idolatry. There are others who are faithful other than you!"* Isn't it reassuring that we are really not alone and fully responsible for the work of God? God is always present in His work.

### **Harvesting**

More often than not, I can say that the extraordinary has been my indication that God was "really at work." We expect that the ordinary is a result of our efforts, and assume it should be the result of everyone else's efforts. We see our mistakes and others' mistakes affecting the work of God. We forget that even the "ordinary" is God's. Thus, when we are "burned out" we begin to criticize others and feel like we are carrying it all alone. God speaks gently and corrects our thinking. It is God's kingdom work! God is behind every scene and nothing is too small for Him.

***Personal Reflection:** The following questions are very personal and possibly too private for some to respond publicly. Read them and take the next five minutes to answer them silently and honestly. You will not have to share your answers.*

1) Have you recently experienced this unresolved yearning to see the Spirit of God at work? I hope so. If you haven't, pray silently that God's small voice will entice you to yearn for more of

Him. If you have, pray silently that God's small voice will be reassuring enough against all the other screaming demands. Ask God to remove all fear (failure, embarrassment, rejection, loss of control) and surrender to being a part of His ongoing work of the kingdom.

2) When was the last time you asked God the question, "Where are you?" Perhaps you have lost someone special to you, or experienced unexpected loss due to illness, job changes, or broken relationships. Maybe you have withstood great opposition and slander. Whichever may have been the situation, the Lord who wants to give you encouragement. Pray that God will point you to others in the Body of Christ that can be there to remind you that you are not alone.

3) Can you remember certain self-destructive thoughts that might have isolated you even more in times of pain? Maybe you harbor resentment for others who you don't believe are holding up their end. Maybe you really feel unappreciated or devalued. Have thoughts against others or against yourself left you unable to continue in your service in the kingdom? Ask God to remind you that you are a precious daughter of His' and therefore, of great worth and value.

### **Celebrating the Bounty**

*Group Reflection: The following questions might be shared with your study group. They are spiritually relevant and safe to be discussed with sisters in Christ.*

1) Elijah had lost perspective of the victories and began to feel the work of God would end without him. He also felt too overwhelmed by the task. Take a few moments to review the past victories won by your group, church, or community. These could be events and occurrences that have demonstrated God's great power.

2) If time permits, everyone may take a turn speaking a phrase that reflects how God has been present in each person's life. Those times can be as gentle and quiet as "His small voice."

*Suggested closing: The following chorus is a popular contemporary song, which your group may or may not know. You may sing it, or it may be used as a prayer.*

In the secret, in the quiet place, in the stillness you are there!  
In the secret in the quiet hour I wait, longing for you.  
'Cause, I want to know you more.  
I want to know you.  
I want to see your face.  
I want to know you more.  
I want to touch you.  
I want to hear your voice.  
I want to know you more.

**Deborah Deaton** has been in church ministry, alongside her husband since 1991. John, her husband, pastors Nebo CP Church in Lexington, Alabama. Deborah has three children (ages 14, 12, and 2), and is presently serving as Hope Region Women's Ministry president. Deborah has recently earned her Ph.D in Educational Psychology from the University of Memphis and is the owner and manager of Step by Step Consulting in Florence, AL. She enjoys teaching and speaking. You can contact her at [deborahdeaton@stepbystepconsulting.us](mailto:deborahdeaton@stepbystepconsulting.us)