

Hanging out With Heros

ELIJAH

Standing Alone
Against the World



Lorraine
Peterson

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Standing Alone Against The World

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ELIJAH: STANDING ALONE AGAINST THE WORLD

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Cover Design: Michael Minnema

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ELIJAH: STANDING ALONE AGAINST THE WORLD

Introduction

Do you ever feel that following Jesus gets a little lonely? That nobody else seems to take Christianity seriously? That when the chips are down you're the only one willing to take a stand? If you're tempted to become discouraged, the life of Elijah will inspire you.

Enter Elijah

TIME: About 864 B. C.

PLACE: The Northern Kingdom of Israel (capital city: Samaria).

SCENE: Jezebel, a sinful swinger from Phoenicia, had married Ahab, the king of Israel. She hated God and had decided the people of Israel were to worship the idol Baal, which she imported from her homeland. Sadly, the people of Israel, who possessed God's law – the Ten Commandments – did not resist her.

Elijah, however, obeyed God's law and, of course, got into trouble. He had prayed the people would turn back to God and God answered that prayer by sending no rain for three and a half years – this would give them good reason to pray to God and change their ways. (People tend to forget rain and sunshine come from the Creator, until the supply is cut off.) God then sent Elijah, first by hiding him near a brook where ravens delivered Elijah's food, then by sending him to a widow's home in which God miraculously multiplied her supply of shortening and flour to feed herself and her son, and Elijah as well.

Elijah's next assignment was to confront Ahab and challenge him to a contest that would show the people who was the true God, Baal or Jehovah. So atop Mount Carmel, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, Elijah took on 450 prophets of Baal. Amidst excitement greater than at a Super Bowl, Baal's prophets built an altar and placed upon it the pieces of an ox as a sacrifice. Then they danced, screamed and cut themselves for hours, trying to gain their god's attention. But he sent no fire. Then Elijah gathered 12 stones for a simple altar and placed upon it the pieces of his ox. Then he had 12 barrels of water poured over the pile – so no one would accuse him of cheating. Then he bowed his head and prayed. Fire roared down from heaven, devoured the meat, and even burned up the stones and water. The audience was impressed. The people immediately fell on their faces and admitted Jehovah, not Baal, was God. And at Elijah's command they executed the prophets of Baal. This was the first time they had obeyed God's laws in years.

Elijah declared to the awestruck Ahab that God would now send rain, though he could not see a single cloud. Then Elijah climbed to Carmel's peak and began praying until a tiny cloud was sighted. Soon came a downpour – and

more trouble. As soon as Ahab arrived at home he told Jezebel what had happened. She became angrier than Ahab ever had seen her and promised to kill Elijah.

Exhausted, Disappeared, and Depressed

This time, rather than trusting God to protect him, Elijah turned chicken and ran. In the middle of the Sinai desert, exhausted, Elijah fell beneath a bush and begged God to let him die. Instead, God sent an angel to give him water and bake him a cake. He ate two meals – and their nourishment lasted forty days! Elijah then headed for Mount Horeb where Moses had received the Ten Commandments. There God spoke quietly to him, renewed his faith, and gave him a fresh assignment.

Elijah apparently spent most of his remaining years training his successor, Elisha, and directing “schools of the prophets.” God kept Ahab out of Elijah’s hair by sending the Syrian army to invade Israel.

A Dangerous Assignment from God

Ahab later threw a tantrum because his neighbor, Naboth, wouldn’t sell his grape field (the Law of Moses didn’t allow a man to sell his land and thus leave his children without property). So crafty Jezebel arranged to have Naboth sentenced to death by a kangaroo court, thus allowing Ahab to confiscate the field. God could tolerate no more; He sent Elijah to tell Ahab the entire royal family was doomed. Soon after, Ahab was killed in battle.

Just to make sure Elijah’s life would be remembered for its uniqueness, God didn’t let him die. Instead, the prophet who had called down fire from heaven was whisked away by a flaming chariot.

Although Elijah often had to stand alone for God, he was not a man to be pitied. Because Elijah’s God was all-powerful, it would be easier to feel sorry for Elijah’s enemies! But just as Elijah was never really alone, you need never be alone. The God of Elijah goes with you to school, to work, and to parties. That should give you confidence.

Facing the Big Bad World Alone

“Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word’” (1 Kings 17: 1).

Would the “I-know-what-the-world-is-all-about” seniors in your Social Problems class laugh if you raised your hand and explained the Bible teaches that sex before marriage is wrong? What reaction would you get if you told your lunchroom gang you always come in at the hour your parent’s request and never try to sneak out without permission? Would you lose all your friends if you reminded your geometry classmates you all deserved the punishment homework and that you planned to complete it? Do you feel like the only one in the whole school who really wants to know God and obey Him? Does it seem that being good is old-fashioned and out of style? Are you afraid that someday you’ll just give in and follow the crowd?

Well, the Bible tells us about a guy who faced your problem: Elijah. Because Jezebel had made idol worship the state religion of Israel, very few people were following Jehovah – the true God. As Elijah looked around him, he felt very much alone. Following God had meant risking his life to deliver a message from Jehovah to the king. Would you like to know where he got his courage? You might be able to use some of it in the locker-room, or in Mr. Cell’s biology class.

The Bible reveals Elijah’s secret. We read in James that Elijah prayed earnestly from a righteous heart (5: 17). Those weren’t emergency, pushbutton, pit stop requests, but deep communication with God. Not only did Elijah pray, he knew God and was conscious of God's constant presence with him.

His opening words to King Ahab were, “As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand ...”

Elijah knew God as He really is – alive, all-powerful, never bummed out, always ready with an answer to each problem.

This he hadn't learned from his grandmother, but from daily depending on the almighty God. And that's the way that you too can learn to receive strength from God.

God is never overwhelmed when evil surrounds you. He knows a light shows up best in a very dark place, so He intends to give you the power to be that light. You may be facing a big bad world but you don't have to face it alone.

"For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones" (Psalm 37: 28).

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31: 6).

"The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 118: 6).

1. Why are you afraid of other people and what they will think of you?
2. Why does God command us not to be afraid of what people think? (See Deuteronomy 31: 6).
3. If you stick with God and are faithful to Him, what does He promise you?
4. Who are the people who scare you? How could praying about your fear and believing God's truth in the above verses make this week different?

Popularity, Self-confidence, a Bullet-Proof Vest, and Money in the Bank

"Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 'Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the ravine of Kerith, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.' So he did what the Lord had told him ... Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no

rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.' So he went to Zarephath ... After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 'Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.' So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab" (1 Kings 17: 2-5, 7-10; 18: 1, 2).

Does the constant criticism from your parents and big sister give you a complex? Do you feel like going into hiding because you missed the critical free throw or flubbed the clarinet solo? Does the first day at a different school or a new job petrify you? Then you have a disease: insecurity. And there's an epidemic going around.

Most cases are the "common chronic variety," but some are acute. For instance, the fear that rises when you read about the stabbing in the school across town, or when you hear the rumor of a neighbor girl being raped, or when you remember the guy who tried to break into your house last month, can cripple you, preventing you from doing God's will.

Psalm 37: 3 has the antidote for paralyzing insecurity: "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture." That may sound too simplistic for real life, but the Bible tells of someone who proved it true – under the circumstances probably a lot worse than yours: His name was Elijah.

Gutsy Elijah had told wicked King Ahab there would be no rain for three years. Elijah's popularity rating soon slipped 75 points as the land dried up, and he found himself ripe for a case of acute insecurity; Ahab's henchmen were ready to kill him on sight, supplies of food and water were withering, and no one seemed willing to trust and obey God.

But Elijah had a secret for coping with immense problems; unquestioning obedience to God's instructions. And those instructions sounded a bit strange. First, he was to camp by a brook and be fed by ravens; then he was to get food and lodging from a poor widow in a foreign country; finally, he was to again – horrors! – confront Ahab. Strange orders, yes, but Elijah did not argue, "Hey, wait a minute, God. Hungry ravens don't feed people during a famine. This brook can't last a week. A penniless widow can't even feed her

family – let alone me. And besides, there’s a price on my head; the moment Ahab’s hit men spot me, I’ll be vulture-bait.” Instead, Elijah assumed God knew what He was doing.

God honored Elijah’s trust. The ravens daily delivered meat and bread. God miraculously supplied the widow with flour and shortening to make bread. And Ahab ended up obeying Elijah.

As you trust God, He cares for you in the same way He cared for Elijah. A. W. Pink, a famous theologian, once observed that God often puts you by a “brook” on the verge of drying up, rather than beside a river flowing from an endless supply – just so you’ll trust *Him* to provide the money, love, or security you need. He will send His “ravens” – a Christian friend with a word of encouragement, a book that’s just what you need, or even a squadron of angels. All power in the universe is His – and it is available to you.

God has all the power in the world; so, if He calls you to be the Elijah of Central High, don’t run away. Just stick around and watch for miracles. The security He provides is a lot better than popularity, self-confidence, a bullet-proof vest, or money in the bank.

“Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (Proverbs 23: 17, 18).

“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (Psalm 62: 5-8).

1. Why is it wrong to keep fussing about all the evil and danger facing you, and using them as excuses to not live wholly for God?
2. What actions on your part will insure God's protection and grace regardless of your situation?
3. What have you been complaining and worrying about lately? Read

again the preceding Bible verses and decide what God wants you to do about worrying and complaining.

Fire from Heaven Instruction Manual

“So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Caramel. Elijah went before the people and said, ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.’ But the people said nothing. At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.’ Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, ‘The Lord, he is God! The Lord – he is God!’” (1 Kings 18: 20, 21, 36-39).

Do you ever imagine yourself in front of a school assembly telling all the students how they can know Jesus? Or giving the perfect speech in English class that will convert not only the teacher, but the entire class? Or being the hero of the football game and telling the news reporters God deserves the credit? Or becoming homecoming queen so people will pay attention to your testimony?

Hold it. Get back on the Reality Train and be logical.

It’s easier to be a one-day hero than to follow God step-by-step, day-by-day, through algebra assignments, school lunches and parking tickets. So stop dreaming about the hero stuff. Fantasizing the glamour and excitement of a one-day spiritual blowout will stop you from obeying God *right now*.

Elijah didn’t spend his life preparing to stage a big show on Mount Carmel. If he had, there would have been no fire – and no rain afterward. Mount Carmel was simply the culmination of walking with God, obeying Him in the little things, day after day. He knew God's voice, so when the moment arrived, he

knew exactly what Jehovah wanted. He was not afraid. He had the calm courage of one who was a friend of God. People could tell he had no experience acting and a lot of practice praying. Although he was number one on Ahab's "Ten Most Wanted" list, no one was trying to kill him. This was no "I've-got-to-do-something-so-here-goes" experiment.

Daydreaming aside, the Mount Carmel fireworks are a wonderful reminder that a lone servant of God can conquer 450 – or a million for that matter – prophets of Baal. God gives power to stand alone, even if all the other kids who claim to be Christians compromise, and the non-Christians treat you as a visitor from another planet. Elijah's power and courage came from God and you can have it too. "One with God is a majority" is more than a nice-sounding platitude. It's the truth.

Let the God of Elijah be your God. Let Him make you the person who stands up for God without being afraid of what other people think or say. But like Elijah, get specific instructions from the Lord. Follow Him step-by-step. Don't try to be the Incredible Christian. Don't attempt Wonder Woman witnessing. Don't decide to write your own Fire from Heaven Manual. Your plans will fail. God's plans will not.

"Woe (big trouble) to the obstinate children," declares the Lord, 'to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin.' This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. You said, "No, we will flee on horses." Therefore, you will flee! You said, "We will ride off on swift horses." Therefore, your pursuers will be swift!' Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!" (Isaiah 30: 1, 15, 16, 18).

1. Why is doing God's work in your own way a form of rebellion?
2. From where does real inner strength come?
3. Are you guilty of not waiting for God's instructions? On what "horses" are you speeding ahead without consulting Him?

4. Why can you receive God's strength only when you follow His plans?
5. Are you willing to give your ideas to God? To scrap or revise them as He commands?

Get Out Your Sword!

“Then Elijah commanded them, ‘Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!’ They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered them there” (1 Kings 18: 40).

You may be shocked that Elijah ordered the execution of Baal’s prophets after their defeat on Mount Carmel. But Elijah was simply carrying out the laws of Israel, whose government was based on God's decrees – those who didn’t want to obey God could leave. The Law of Moses demanded that the person who spiritually misled the people should be put to death: “That prophet ... must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God ... You must purge the evil from among you” (Deuteronomy 13: 5). Such an extreme law would be similar to requiring the death penalty for anyone advocating heroin for teenagers (thus contributing to many early deaths). False prophets in Israel were engineering the spiritual death of fellow citizens. Heaven and hell were at stake. Therefore, these prophets could not be allowed to live.

Now before you spearhead a bloody campaign to rid the land of today’s false teachers, take stock of Romans 13: 1; “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” God requires you to live by the laws of your government, and there is no death penalty in this country for leaders who spiritually deceive and harm their followers.

So what does killing false prophets have to do with you? It teaches a very practical principle: never compromise with sin. Totally eliminate it from your life.

When many around you are boldly doing wrong and few want to follow God, it’s easy to rationalize God's standards of holiness. It’s easy to conclude

you're so much better than those around you that you don't have to strictly follow the Bible. But God's standards don't change because society is more wicked. He hasn't changed His mind about the sinfulness of lying, premarital sex, gossiping, or watching porn online. He won't make an exception for you just because "everybody's doing it." Instead, disobeying God will rob you of spiritual strength, and the worse the world gets, the more you'll need that strength.

Make a clean break with anything pulling you away from God; don't try to gradually stop. Someone has observed if you must cut off a dog's tail, it is better to slice it off all at once than to chop off an inch at a time! So treat temptation like that dog's tail. Turn off the TV the moment you realize that a show will pollute your thought life. Change the subject the moment a conversation shifts to gossip and criticism. Have your parents write a note so you'll be excused from the class in which an occult game is being played. Don't listen when you're told selfishness and rebellion are normal adolescent behavior.

Execute the "prophets of Baal" in your life, the influences that deceive and lead you to rebel against God. Start swinging your sword – "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6: 17).

"Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5: 22).

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12: 2).

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2: 15).

1. Have truth and standards for right and wrong changed? Why not?
2. Why is it easy to get your ideas about good and evil from the world around you instead of the Bible? Why is this method dangerous?
3. Ask God to show you if you are being deceived about any issue in

your life. If you're simply confused, rather than deceived, do a Bible study on that subject by using a concordance or asking your spiritual leader for Scripture passages that will clarify the matter for you.

4. The “things in the world” are temporary. Which things in your life are temporary? Which are permanent, eternal?

Look at the World Through Faith-Colored Glasses

“Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, ‘May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.’ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life” (1 Kings 19: 1-3).

For three years, Elijah had witnessed miracles every day. Ravens had fed him in the desert. A widow’s oil and flour supplies had never run empty. A king bent on murder had instead carried out his commands. Elijah had prayed down fire and rain from heaven. People had repented of their idol worship. And certainly, there would be wonderful opportunities to teach these people the ways of God.

And then it happened. Elijah fell apart and acted as though God didn’t even exist. Elijah panicked and ran when Queen Jezebel vowed she would kill him. Why? After all, he had been a hunted man for three years. Admittedly, he was physically and emotionally drained and therefore in a vulnerable condition. But why such paranoia after years of bold faith? It was as though, like Peter, he had suddenly realized he’d been walking on water, and instead of looking through eyes of faith, he looked at the physical realities; water + gravity = drowning; only in Elijah’s case it was: queen + anger = death. But God hadn’t changed. He had just as much power as ever. But Elijah short-circuited the power line.

You’ve probably made the same mistake yourself. Perhaps last month you trusted God to give you power to live above the tension and chaos in your home, and things went remarkably well. But then your little sister borrowed

your best blouse without permission and spilled sulfuric acid on it in chemistry lab – and your marvelous faith for your home situation went up in smoke. You started to look at the problems in human terms and saw no solution in sight.

Or maybe for a long time you had been trusting God for your dating life, but then Jody's smart remark spurred you to quit waiting for God's best; instead you decided to lay a trap for a Saturday night date. Or you may have told God it was okay if you weren't muscular and athletic, but one day in front of the mirror you started listening to Satan's whispers and now you feel ugly and unacceptable.

Actually, the situation is not the problem. Instead, it is the attitude you choose to adopt toward that problem that makes the difference. When Jesus healed two blind men, He told them, "According to your faith will it be done to you" (Matthew 9: 29). It is a spiritual principle, a formula. The answer may not come instantly, but "(God) acts on behalf of those who wait for him" (Isaiah 64: 4). If you decide to face the problems of life without depending on an all-powerful God, nearly every problem will defy a solution. You must look at the world through faith-colored glasses.

Evidently, Elijah learned his lesson from this incident and taught his successor, Elisha, the importance of facing each crisis with unwavering faith:

"When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. 'Oh, my lord, what shall we do?' the servant asked. 'Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, 'O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.' Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6: 15-17).

1. What do you think the servant would have done if Elisha had not prayed for him?
2. Do you constantly pray for God to help you see things through the eyes of faith? Or are you part of the "Alas, what shall we do"

club?

3. What is true reality, everything we see around us, or God's power?
4. What problems are you looking at from a human viewpoint? Now ask God to open your eyes and put faith-colored glasses on you.

Panic and a Picnic

“Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. ‘I have had enough, Lord,’ he said. ‘Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.’ Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat.’ He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again ... Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. 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?’ He replied, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken 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.’ 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. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 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?’ He replied, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken 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.’ 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. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of

Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet’” (1 Kings 19: 3-6, 8-16).

Have you ever come home from school completely discouraged, feeling as if all your teachers yell at you, your friends ignore you, and your parents don’t understand you, even though you’re trying your hardest to do everything right?

Well, Elijah’s day had been even worse although it had begun fabulously. After the fire from heaven had proven who was the true God and rain had fallen for the first time in three and a half years, he had expected the nation – even the king and queen – to turn to God. Instead, Jezebel was determined to kill him by the next morning.

After a panicked run into the desert, Elijah fell beneath a scrubby bush. He had no food or water. He begged God to let him die.

Although Elijah deserved it, God did not yell at him, or give him a long lecture, or write him off His list. Rather, he sent an angel to bake a cake for Elijah and give him water – a picnic in the desert! And then he spoke to Elijah with a still small voice. He understood how Elijah was feeling.

God also understands when the pressure on you is too great. He wants to meet your physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. He will do it, regardless of the circumstances. How does it happen?

First, you must realize it is never God’s will for you to sit around and mope, endlessly mulling over your problems. When you’re tempted to do this, ask God what you should do next. It usually will be something ordinary such as cleaning your room, tackling the hard biology assignment, apologizing to your father, or getting to bed at a decent time. God assigned Elijah several tasks. As he completed them, his depression vaporized. Ask God for your next assignment.

Second, stop trying to run away. Forget your plans for dropping out of school or moving to another city. God sent Elijah right back into Jezebel’s territory. (He could have saved himself a trip by listening to God in the first place!) Don’t panic or make rash decisions. Be willing to stay exactly where you are until God moves you, or changes the circumstance, or changes you. And

usually God wants to change you.

Elijah could have eaten his picnic in much more pleasant surroundings if only he hadn't yielded to his fears. God has some picnics planned for you too. If you'll trust Him even through tough times, you'll enjoy them much more than Elijah enjoyed his.

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41: 10).

“Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed” (Hebrews 12: 12, 13).

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6: 9).

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men ...” (Colossians 3: 23).

1. Using the above verses, write a prescription to cure discouragement.
2. Hebrews 12: 12, 13 teaches that if you baby yourself and engage in self-pity, God cannot heal your hurts and heartaches. List the problems about which you will now stop feeling sorry for yourself, and for which you will now trust God. Ask Him to heal the raw edges of your emotions.
3. Do you study “heartily, as serving the Lord”? Do you work with the strength that God can supply, or are you prone to give up? Ask Him to teach you to conquer discouragement by obeying in these things.
4. According to Galatians 6: 9, what is the reward for sticking with a task?

Survival Kit for the Lonely, Outnumbered Christian

“Now Ben-Hadad king of Aram mustered his entire army. Accompanied by thirty-two kings with their horses and chariots, he went up and besieged Samaria and attacked it. Meanwhile a prophet came to Ahab king of Israel and announced, ‘This is what the Lord says: “Do you see this vast army? I will give it into your hand today, and then you will know that I am the Lord.”’ Afterward, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said, ‘Strengthen your position and see what must be done, because next spring the king of Aram will attack you again.’ The next spring Ben-Hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, ‘This is what the Lord says: “Because the Arameans think the Lord is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the Lord”’” (1 Kings 20: 1, 13, 22, 26, 28).

If you're the only Christian on the football team, or the only person who comes faithfully to youth group meetings at your church, or the only person at work who refused the invitation to a wild party last weekend, you're probably ripe for the “They’re-out-to-get-me” mentality. But before you fall for it, memorize this verse: “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him” (Proverbs 16: 7).

Elijah saw the principle of that verse in action as God went to great lengths to provide him with some peace and quiet. God protected him from Jezebel; He sent the whole Syrian army to keep Ahab occupied; He even made Ahab want to hear Elijah’s student prophets prophesy about upcoming battles. All these were miracles. But Elijah would never have seen miracles without first obeying God in the midst of crises.

If you consider yourself Miss Persecuted and Picked-On Christian, ask God what you are doing that doesn’t please Him. If your attitude toward your “enemies” is, “I’m better than you because I don’t do dreadful, dirty, disgusting deeds,” no wonder they don’t respect you. Perhaps you're guilty of legalism – avoiding or denouncing things only because of tradition or your ungodly attitudes, not because of what the Bible or Holy Spirit has said. Perhaps it is hardness of heart, a self-centered unwillingness to care for other

people. Perhaps you're touchy, easily offended, expecting others to be as understanding as God. Whatever your personality defect, if you ask God He will point it out and remake you so people will respect you.

But if you're looking for instant respect and peace, beware. God did not say, "If your life pleases me, your enemies will be at peace with you *today*." His promise has no time limit. For instance, Paul was an enemy of godly Stephen, even wholeheartedly approving stoning him, but he did not make peace with Stephen until long after Stephen's death. Instead of assuming your Christian testimony is causing people to hate you, ask God if your life pleases Him, and be willing to change. Then when your heart is pure, pray for your enemy until God changes his heart. This kind of attitude may be one of the most important items in the survival kit for the lonely, outnumbered Christian.

"The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because in his early years he walked in the ways his father David had followed. He did not consult the Baals but sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel. The Lord established the kingdom under his control; and all Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, so that he had great wealth and honor. His heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord; furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherah poles from Judah. In the third year of his reign he sent his officials Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah to teach in the towns of Judah. They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the Lord; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people. The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah, so that they did not make war with Jehoshaphat. Some Philistines brought Jehoshaphat gifts and silver as a tribute, and the Arabs brought him flocks ... (2 Chronicles 17: 3-7, 9-11).

1. List the things Jehoshaphat did that pleased the Lord. Mark with a check which ones you also do (be honest).
2. Jehoshaphat made certain everyone in his country was taught God's laws. Do you plead ignorance as an excuse for your disobedience, or do you diligently search God's Word for guidance

and answers?

3. Have you ever used the persecuted Christian excuse to avoid dealing with your faults and sins?
4. Make a list of enemies. Now, as you pray for them, what attitudes and actions should you take toward them?