

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, 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." ⁵ Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

⁷ The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. (1 Kings 19:3-8 NIV2011)

Realistic Expectations

"You can't always get what you want..." My dad liked to crank that song up when the Rolling Stones would be playing on the radio. He thought he was being funny while reminding his angsty children about the facts of life.

You know it. You live it. It's a hard lesson taught at a young age. Disappointments, failures, plans falling through, expectations go unfulfilled—however you want to express it—it's something we have to deal with living in a fallen world. We like to think that we get better at accepting it as we grow and mature. At times we let it just roll off our backs. We realize there is nothing we can do. You have to accept it and move on with life. It's not enjoyable. We don't like it when it happens. But we can deal with it. Then there are the times. Those times can be pretty rough because you see someone else is dealing with a similar situation better than you are and you can't figure out why you are reacting like this. Other times it's because everything finally seemed to be going the right way. All that hard work finally looks like it's starting to pay off. The expectations are high! Then like a tower of *Jenga*, one peg is pulled out and life feels like it is crashing down around you. Or it feels like a chain reaction of bad keeps and it's getting harder to handle as one thing leads to another. You keep expecting there to be some type of relief. But it never seems to come. And if someone tells you to count your blessings one more time, you are about to lose your mind. When certain expectations go unfulfilled it can be more than frustrating. It is depressing. It can be devastating.

That's what Elijah seems to be dealing with in 1 Kings 19. He had just watched this incredible act of power when the fire of the Lord fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice on Mt. Carmel. The people cry out, "The Lord—He is God! The Lord—He is God." They slaughter the priests of that false god Baal. The people were turning back to the Lord! After holding it back for three years of drought the Lord sends rain. It was a great victory for the Lord! Momentum was swinging in the right direction. Things were looking up.

Then Elijah receives the message. The wicked Queen Jezebel found out what Elijah did to those priests. She threatens Elijah, “You better watch out. By this time tomorrow, I’m going to kill you.” Elijah can take a hint. So he runs south to Beersheba in Judah where he leaves his servant. Then Elijah just keeps on running. After a day’s journey into the wilderness Elijah finds a bush, sits down, and prays, **“I’ve had enough, Lord. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors”** (v.4).

What happened? It’s not like Elijah wasn’t use to disappointments. King Ahab had ignored his warnings before this; hence no rain for three years. Elijah’s life was far from luxurious being fed by ravens and living with a widow and her son in poverty during those three years. What’s going on?

This time was supposed to be different. This time Ahab and even Jezebel would have to acknowledge the one true God. Elijah was supposed to be different. He was supposed to be better. He was supposed to be the one who turned Israel from their sins and back to the Lord. But then he wasn’t. “I’m not better than my ancestors. I should be; but, I’m not. Lord, I’ve had enough.” Remember, Elijah is a great prophet of the Lord. He’s not a weak person. I don’t think it’s a weakness of faith. It’s not a lack of trust. It’s seeing all the work that he had done, all the effort he had put in, and for what? When his expectations go unfulfilled, there’s nothing more that Elijah feels like he can do. “Lord, I’m done. I’m through. What more could you ask from me? I’ve had enough.”

You’ve been there too. You thought you were making some head way with this person. It looked like you were making some real change. Everything looked like it was lining up. You don’t even know what happened before everything fell through and you are left to pick up the pieces.

You made the phone calls. You had the conversations. You told them so many different times in different ways. You were loving. You were caring. You expected them to listen. This time you were sure you would see change. Instead, from what you can tell, nothing. It can feel like a wiser use of your time would have been talking to the wall that you feel like banging your head against.

You were just trying to help. Instead somehow what you said or did lit an invisible fuse and the whole situation blew up in your face. You expected to help and instead it seems like you made things worse.

Then there’s your personal life plans and goals. It wasn’t anything too fancy or far-fetched. You didn’t want much. You wanted a family that looked like *this*. You were working for a career or job that you expected would be like *that*. You would live in a place along the lines of *that*. Your spouse would be like *this*. You would have so much saved up in retirement, you would live comfortably, and the children would listen and make sure to hit all of the goals you had planned out for them. Then one day you looked and thought, “I didn’t think my life would be like this,” and not in a good way. It wasn’t supposed to be like this. I should be better. If it’s not coming for you, you sense it from

other people. You don't want to say anything lest someone accuse you of being ungrateful or unthankful. Don't worry; you've counted the blessings.

You see that list in Ephesians 4: **“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”** (v. 31, 32).

Forgive as Christ forgave me? How, after what they did? Be kind and compassionate, some days. Other days impatience wins and frustration gets taken out on those closest to you. It doesn't take too long to be bitter about life, feel that rage and anger starting to boil over when one thing happens after another. It's easy to get into verbal brawling with him and talking behind her back when they haven't lived up to your personal expectations.

You know that you should be better. I expect myself to be better. I want to be better. And then when those expectations go unfulfilled, “Lord, I've had enough.” Enough disappointments. Enough frustrations. I can't handle anymore. No one seems to listen. Even fewer seem to care. Life feels like a bad movie that you can't get out of or turn off. Sometimes, like Elijah, all you want to do is go back to bed and start the day over. Other days it's hard to get out of bed or really care—what's the point? Why put in the effort? Maybe you try and lose yourself in your work. Maybe you just need to work harder. Make sure to stay busy. You dare not stop or you might start thinking and have to deal with it. Lord, I have had enough of feeling like a failure. A disappointment. Of feeling like I'm the wrong person for the job. Of feeling like a weak or bad Christian because I feel this way. Lord, I've had enough.

Elijah is ready to be done when all at once an angel appears prodding Elijah awake, “Get up and eat.” There at his head is some freshly baked bread and some water. So Elijah eats and drinks and lays down again. The angel returns. Again he prods Elijah awake, “Get up and eat.” This time he adds, “The journey is too great for you.” In other words, you need this because God is not done with you. So, strengthened by this miraculous food, Elijah travels for forty days and forty nights until he eventually arrives at Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God. If we were to keep reading in this section, you would hear how the presence of the Lord appears to Elijah. There the Lord revives his servant not with great acts of visible power and might, but with spoken Word and promises. Elijah needed to remember who he was and who the Lord is. The Lord never left Elijah even when Elijah felt like he had used up his usefulness. There was more work for him to do. The Lord all but acknowledges Elijah's confession that he can't do this anymore when the angel says: “The journey is too great for you.” No, it wouldn't come from Elijah's will, his strength, pulling himself up, working harder that would get him through this. No, you can't do it, Elijah. But the Lord can. And the Lord will. And with the Lord, Elijah can and Elijah will.

So the Lord continues to feed and strengthen us for the journey of life ahead. “I am the bread of life,” Jesus says. Deep down we know that there is nothing in this world, no matter how hard we try, that will fill us up enough. There will always be more

expectations we put on ourselves or demands from others. So God draws us to himself to feed us with the bread of life so that we too might remember who we are and who he is. Your identity is found in the one who was rejected by those he came to save. Your peace rests in the one God forsakes for our sins. Your conscience is freed by the one came down from heaven to fulfill the expectations of God's Law to do better with his perfect life and innocent death. Your confidence comes from God's Son who he gave up for us all. It's sealed to you in his rising from the grave. Jesus' victory is your victory. When God looks at you, he does not see a failure. He sees his own child who He raised with Jesus in the water of baptism. He's not disappointed with you; you are the Bride of Christ who has been clothed in Jesus' righteousness and perfection. He's proud to call you his own. When he looks at you he sees one he chose before the creation of the world. He sees his own handiwork, created in Christ to do this work which he prepared in advance for you to do. In Jesus', God's expectations—whose are the only ones that actually matter—have already been fulfilled. In Jesus, he gives you meaning and purpose in this life. Yes, on your own you are too weak. But it's not about you trying harder, needing to study your Bible more, need to trust more. Jesus assures you, "My grace, my forgiving love, is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness."

As long as we live in this fallen world, there will always be more expectations. As dearly loved children of God, we want to grow and mature in Christ's love for us. There's always more room to grow. And so the Lord gives you heavenly food to feed you and see realistic expectations. Be in the Word. It's not the magic bullet to fulfill all expectations. It is where Jesus reminds you are dearly loved by God and that he is your Savior whose love for you never changes. Make regular use of the Lord's Supper. There Jesus assures you that are you still a forgiven child of God and this body and blood you receive are given and poured out for you. God does not call us to change the world. Only the Gospel changes hearts. He doesn't call you to save anyone. They already have a perfect Savior in Jesus. He does call us to love and serve our neighbor and he works through you to lead them to Him. Amen.