The Valley of the Shadow of Death: Depression & Despair

When Elijah was on the mountain he experienced extraordinary phenomena, but God was not in those things. Then Elijah heard something strange. The Hebrew word does not translate directly into any English idea. The sound of silence, a gentle whisper, a still small voice is how some translators try to capture the idea. This is where God is found. Elijah had fallen into despair because there was no response from the people from the extraordinary event that he had been a part of, and now God was revealing something very significant about how his world functions. There is much we can learn from this interaction, so let's spend some time this week digging deeper.

Day One
The Extraordinary Gift of Ordinary Blessings
Recognizing God's goodness in the sun, the rain, and the everyday provisions of life

Primary Scripture: Matthew 5:43–48
Additional Scripture: Acts 14:15–17; Psalm 104:10–30; Psalm 145:8–9; Genesis 8:20–22; James 1:17

We tend to associate the power of God with extraordinary events. We think of the parting of the Red Sea, fire falling from heaven, the resurrection of Jesus,

or some remarkable answer to prayer. These are certainly demonstrations of God's power, and Scripture gives them an important place in the story of redemption. But there is another expression of God's power that we can easily overlook: the ordinary, dependable provision through which he sustains life every day.

Consider the sunrise. It comes each morning, whether we are watching or not. The seasons change, plants grow, rain falls, rivers flow, and the earth produces food. We become so accustomed to these things that we rarely stop to consider how remarkable they are. Because they happen regularly, we may regard them as unremarkable.

Yet Jesus draws our attention to precisely these ordinary events when he teaches his disciples about the character of God.

In Matthew 5:45, Jesus says that the Father "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." Notice the setting. Jesus is teaching his followers to love their enemies. His argument is that God's own goodness extends beyond those who deserve it. God gives sunshine and rain not merely to the righteous, but also to the unrighteous. His generosity is not limited to those who acknowledge him.

This is a remarkable observation. Every person who has ever enjoyed a beautiful morning, eaten a meal, drawn a breath, or benefited from the fruitfulness of the earth has experienced something of God's goodness. Many

people receive these blessings without recognizing the One who gives them.

The apostle Paul makes a similar point in Acts 14:15–17. Speaking to people who did not know the true God, Paul explains that the living God made heaven and earth and has not left himself without witness. How has God borne witness to himself? Paul points to the ordinary blessings of life: rain from heaven, fruitful seasons, food, and gladness.

Paul does not begin with an extraordinary miracle. He begins with the harvest.

The implication is profound: the ordinary goodness of creation is itself a testimony to the goodness of the Creator.

God's providence is often hidden in plain sight
Psalm 104 is one of Scripture's most beautiful descriptions of God's sustaining work in creation. The psalmist describes springs providing water for animals, grass growing for livestock, plants growing for human beings, bread strengthening the heart, and wine gladdening it. He describes the sea filled with creatures and the earth filled with God's works.

The psalmist sees all of this as the continuing activity of God.
Psalm 104:27–28 says:
"These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good

things."

We might describe the processes involved in agriculture, meteorology, or biology. We can explain how water cycles through the atmosphere, how plants convert sunlight into energy, and how ecosystems sustain life. These explanations are valuable, but they do not eliminate the theological significance of what is happening.

The Bible does not ask us to choose between understanding the processes of creation and recognizing God's providence through those processes. The regularity of creation is not evidence of God's absence. It is one of the ways his faithful provision is displayed.

Theologians have often used the expression common grace to describe God's undeserved goodness toward humanity generally, including those who do not know or worship him. The sunshine and rain of Matthew 5:45 are a classic example. This is distinct from the saving grace by which God reconciles sinners to himself through Christ. Nevertheless, it reminds us that God's generosity toward his creation is far greater than we often recognize.

The danger of taking ordinary blessings for granted
There is a spiritual danger in becoming accustomed to God's goodness. We can receive his gifts so regularly that we stop recognizing them as gifts.

Think about the food on your table. It represents far more than the work of the

person who prepared it. It represents sunlight, rain, soil, seed, harvest, transportation, labor, and countless other provisions. Behind this chain of ordinary events stands the God who sustains his creation, who creates a moral order that allows large societies to function, that provides motivation and the ability to cooperate and bless one another. Everyday we get up and our society functions is like a million miracles taking place all at once.

This is why Scripture repeatedly calls us to thanksgiving.
James 1:17 reminds us that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." The point is not that every pleasant circumstance is necessarily a direct reward for our behavior. Jesus explicitly says that rain falls on both the righteous and the unrighteous. Rather, the point is that every genuine good thing ultimately depends upon the generosity of God.

This truth should cultivate humility. We are not self-sufficient creatures who have earned the right to exist. We depend upon God for our very lives, and he usually provides this blessing through the ordinary acts of other people. Do we know as much as the brain surgeon? Do we work as hard as the laborer? Yet we benefit from all the acquired wisdom and hard work of society.

It should also cultivate gratitude. The Christian who recognizes God's ordinary goodness has countless reasons to give thanks, even when life is not going particularly well.

Learning to see God's goodness in the ordinary

The lesson is not that every day will be easy, nor that every season will be fruitful. Scripture acknowledges drought, famine, illness, suffering, and loss. God's providence does not promise that we will always receive the particular circumstances we desire.

But it does teach us that God remains the sovereign and faithful Creator, even when we cannot see the whole picture.

Elijah learned something of this at Horeb. He had witnessed fire fall from heaven on Mount Carmel, but his expectations of God's work were challenged when God revealed himself in the sound of a low whisper or sheer silence (1 Kings 19:11–13). The precise translation of that expression is debated, but the contrast is clear: God's presence and purposes were not limited to spectacular displays.

We can make the same mistake Elijah was in danger of making. We may look for God only in extraordinary experiences while overlooking the quiet, ordinary ways he sustains us.

Perhaps today God's goodness is evident in a meal, a conversation, a moment of rest, the kindness of a friend, the opportunity to work, or simply the fact that another morning has arrived.

These things are not insignificant. They are reminders that we live in a world continually dependent upon the goodness of God.

The ordinary blessings of life are extraordinary when we recognize the extraordinary goodness of the One who gives them.

Questions for reflection

What ordinary blessings have I become so accustomed to that I rarely stop to thank God for them?

How does Matthew 5:45 change the way I think about God's goodness toward the world?

How might recognizing God's providence in ordinary circumstances cultivate greater gratitude in my daily life?

Is there an ordinary blessing today that I can intentionally recognize as a gift from God?

Day 2

The Extraordinary Power of Ordinary Decisions

How daily choices and godly habits shape the direction of our lives

Primary Scripture: Galatians 6:7–10

Additional Scripture: Psalm 1:1–3; Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Luke 16:10; Proverbs 4:23–27; 1 Timothy 4:7–8; Hebrews 3:12–13

Most people can identify a handful of extraordinary moments that have shaped their lives. There may have been a major decision, a significant opportunity, a crisis, a marriage, a move, or an encounter that changed the direction of their future.

But what if the most influential decisions in our lives are not usually the extraordinary ones? What if the direction of our lives is determined far more by the small decisions we make repeatedly?

A single decision may not seem particularly important. What difference does it make whether I spend a few minutes reading Scripture today? Does it really matter whether I choose to speak patiently rather than angrily? Is it significant whether I spend time in prayer, encourage someone, resist a temptation, or give attention to my family?

Individually, these choices may appear small. But repeated over time, they establish patterns. Those patterns become habits, and those habits help

shape the kind of people we become.

Scripture has much to say about this principle.

We reap what we sow

In Galatians 6:7–9, Paul writes:

"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."

Paul then explains that the person who sows to the flesh will reap corruption, while the person who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life. He concludes by encouraging believers not to grow weary in doing good, because in due season they will reap if they do not give up.

Paul uses an agricultural illustration that would have been familiar to his readers. A farmer does not plant a seed one morning and expect to harvest a crop that afternoon. There is a process. The seed is planted, the soil is

cultivated, time passes, and eventually a harvest appears.

The farmer's daily work may seem repetitive and unremarkable. Yet the eventual harvest depends upon that ordinary, repeated work.

The same principle applies to our spiritual lives.

A person does not ordinarily become patient through one extraordinary act of patience. Patience is developed through countless opportunities to respond patiently. A person does not become generous through one isolated gift. Generosity develops as the heart learns to give repeatedly. A person does not become knowledgeable in Scripture through one afternoon of reading. Biblical understanding grows through sustained attention to God's Word.

Our ordinary decisions are planting seeds.

The formation of character happens over time

Psalm 1 provides a beautiful picture of the person whose life is rooted in God's Word.

The blessed person does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers. Instead, his delight is in the law of the Lord, and he meditates on it day and night.

The psalm then compares this person to a tree planted by streams of water. The tree bears fruit in its season, its leaf does not wither, and it prospers.

Notice that the image is not of a tree that suddenly appears fully grown. It is a tree with roots. It is established in a particular place and continually receives the nourishment necessary for life.

The strength of the tree is largely hidden. We see the fruit and the leaves, but the roots are doing their work beneath the surface.

Our spiritual lives are similar. Much of what shapes our character happens in places that other people never see. It happens in our private thoughts, our daily reading, our prayers, our responses to frustration, and our decisions when no one else is watching.

Godly character is not simply something we display when the circumstances demand it. It is something that is cultivated through a life increasingly rooted in Christ.

This helps explain why Scripture places such importance on the heart.

Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." Our outward conduct is connected to what we allow to shape our inward lives.

Small decisions are not insignificant

Consider some of the ordinary practices Scripture commends:

- Reading and meditating on God's Word (Psalm 1:2; Psalm 119:9–16).
- Praying regularly (Daniel 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- Encouraging fellow believers (Hebrews 3:13; 10:24–25).
- Practicing generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6–8).
- Speaking words that build others up (Ephesians 4:29).
- Practicing forgiveness (Ephesians 4:31–32).
- Giving thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- Doing good without growing weary (Galatians 6:9–10).

None of these practices requires an extraordinary event. They are available in the ordinary circumstances of life.

This does not mean that Christian growth is simply the result of willpower, discipline, or self-improvement. We cannot manufacture holiness by accumulating religious activities. Salvation is God's gracious work, received through faith in Jesus Christ, not something earned through good habits (Ephesians 2:8–10).

But the same grace that saves us also teaches us to live differently (Titus

2:11–14). Spiritual disciplines are not a way of purchasing God's favor. They are ways of responding to his grace and placing ourselves regularly before the means through which he strengthens our faith.

We read Scripture because we need to hear God's Word. We pray because we depend upon him. We gather with other believers because we need encouragement and accountability. We practice generosity because Christ has been generous toward us.

These habits do not replace God's work in us. They are part of the ordinary pattern of life through which we learn to depend upon him.

The danger of neglecting small things

The opposite is also true. Destructive habits rarely appear fully developed.

A little dishonesty can become a pattern of deception. A little resentment, left unattended, can become bitterness. A small compromise can make the next compromise easier. Neglecting prayer and Scripture for a day may not seem

consequential, but repeated neglect can gradually weaken our attentiveness to God.

Hebrews 3:12–13 warns believers about the deceitfulness of sin and urges them to encourage one another daily so that their hearts will not become hardened.

Notice the word daily. The writer understands that spiritual faithfulness requires continual attention.

We should not be surprised that our lives are shaped by what we repeatedly practice. That is true of our relationship with God, our relationships with other people, and our moral character.

Start with the next ordinary decision

It is easy to become discouraged when we think about how far we have to

grow. We may see the difference between the person we are and the person we ought to be, and the distance can seem overwhelming.

But we do not have to transform our entire lives in one afternoon.

We can begin with the next decision.

The next time we are tempted to respond in anger, we can choose patience. The next time we have an opportunity to encourage someone, we can speak. The next time we open our Bible, we can listen attentively. The next time we are tempted to compromise, we can choose obedience.

Over time, these decisions matter.

And when we fail, we do not have to despair. We return to Christ, confess our sin, receive his forgiveness, and continue walking in the grace he provides (1 John 1:9).

God is not asking us to produce extraordinary results through our own strength. He calls us to faithfulness in the ordinary circumstances he has given us.

Luke 16:10 reminds us that the person who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much.

Do not underestimate the spiritual significance of an ordinary day. The decisions you make today are helping shape the person you will become tomorrow.

A life of faithfulness is usually built one ordinary act of obedience at a time.

Questions for reflection

1. What repeated habits are currently shaping my spiritual life?
2. Are there small compromises or neglected responsibilities that I have allowed to become patterns?

3. What one ordinary practice could I begin or strengthen that would help me grow in Christ?
4. How can I approach spiritual disciplines as responses to God's grace rather than attempts to earn his favor?

Day 3

The Extraordinary Influence of Ordinary People

How the everyday decisions of a population shape the character and direction of a society

Primary Scripture: Matthew 13:31–33

Additional Scripture: Proverbs 14:34; Jeremiah 29:4–7; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:13–16; 1 Timothy 2:1–4; 1 Peter 2:11–12

When we think about the rise and fall of nations, we often focus on extraordinary events and influential individuals. We study great leaders,

military victories, political revolutions, economic crises, and major cultural movements. These events certainly matter. A single decision by a powerful ruler can affect millions of people.

But there is another way to think about the course of a society. What if its character is shaped not only by the extraordinary actions of a few, but also by the accumulated ordinary decisions of millions?

A society is made up of people. Those people make decisions every day about honesty, work, family, responsibility, justice, generosity, truth, and the treatment of their neighbors. These decisions influence homes, workplaces, schools, churches, businesses, and communities.

Over time, the collective character of a population has an enormous effect on the kind of society it becomes.

Scripture gives us several ways to understand this relationship between ordinary faithfulness and the larger world.

The small things that influence the whole

In Matthew 13:31–33, Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven through two small and ordinary illustrations: a mustard seed and leaven.

The mustard seed is small, yet it grows into a plant large enough for birds to nest in its branches. Leaven is mixed into a large quantity of flour, but eventually works its way through the entire batch.

Both illustrations emphasize the surprising influence of something that initially appears insignificant.

Jesus is not developing political theory here, and we should be careful not to read into the words of Jesus modern issues and concerns. Nevertheless, the illustrations help us recognize an important biblical principle: what begins small and inconspicuous can have an influence far greater than its initial

appearance suggests.

The same principle can be observed in ordinary human life.

One honest person may not change an entire business, but a culture of honesty can shape an organization. One parent may not transform a community, but generations of parents teaching their children truthfulness, responsibility, and compassion can influence a community profoundly.

One person who refuses to participate in corruption may seem insignificant. But when many people make the same decision, the culture begins to change.

The small decisions of individuals are not always visible to the larger population, but their combined influence can be substantial.

The moral character of a nation matters

Proverbs 14:34 states:

"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

This proverb offers a concise statement about the relationship between moral character and the well-being of a society.

It does not promise that every righteous nation will enjoy immediate prosperity or that every wicked society will collapse tomorrow. Scripture contains many examples of righteous people suffering under unjust governments and wicked rulers enjoying temporary success.

But the proverb identifies a moral reality: righteousness is good for a people, while sin brings disgrace and destruction.

Consider the ordinary moral decisions that contribute to a healthy society:

- Parents who teach their children to tell the truth.

- Employers who treat workers fairly.
- Employees who perform their responsibilities honestly.
- Business owners who refuse to exploit customers.
- Neighbors who care for people in need.
- Citizens who respect the rights and dignity of others.
- Judges and public officials who pursue justice rather than personal advantage.
- Churches that serve their communities and proclaim the truth.
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These activities may not make headlines. They rarely produce dramatic historical turning points. But they help establish the moral foundations upon which a healthy society depends.

Conversely, when dishonesty becomes normal, when greed is celebrated, when families neglect their responsibilities, when the vulnerable are exploited, and when people cease to care about their neighbors, the effects eventually become visible throughout society.

The health of a society cannot be separated entirely from the character of the people who compose it.

The responsibility of God's people in the world

One of the most instructive passages on this subject is Jeremiah 29:4–7.

The people of Judah had been carried into exile in Babylon. They had lost their homeland, their political independence, and much of what had defined their national life. It would have been understandable for them to withdraw into despair or to spend their lives longing only for the day they could return home.

But through Jeremiah, God gave them a surprising instruction.

They were to build houses, plant gardens, establish families, and seek the welfare of the city in which they had been placed. They were even instructed to pray to the Lord on behalf of that city.

In other words, they were not to abandon ordinary life simply because they

lived in a society that did not share their faith.

They were to live faithfully where God had placed them.

This instruction is particularly important because Babylon was not a godly society. The people of Judah were not being told to approve of Babylon's idolatry or abandon their distinct identity as God's covenant people. They were being instructed to pursue the good of the place where they lived while remaining faithful to the Lord.

There is an important lesson here for Christians.

We may not control the direction of our society. We may not have the ability to change national policies or reverse every cultural trend. We may be disappointed by the decisions of leaders and concerned about the moral direction of our communities.

But we are not powerless.

We can seek the welfare of the places where God has placed us. We can be faithful in our homes, workplaces, churches, and neighborhoods. We can practice justice, love mercy, speak truth, care for the vulnerable, and pray for those in authority.

These responsibilities are not insignificant simply because they are ordinary.

Salt and light

Jesus gives his disciples another picture of their influence in Matthew 5:13–16. He calls them the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Salt does not need to be large to have an effect. A relatively small amount can influence an entire dish. Light does not have to illuminate an entire world to be useful; even a small lamp can make a dark room navigable.

Jesus is teaching his followers that their lives should make a visible difference in the world around them.

He does not say that the disciples must become politically powerful or socially prominent before they can have influence. Their influence begins with the character of their lives and the good works that point others to their Father in heaven.

This should change the way we think about Christian influence.

Sometimes we become so concerned about the direction of the world that we overlook the responsibilities God has placed directly in front of us. We worry about national trends while neglecting our own words. We criticize the moral failures of society while failing to practice honesty in our own business dealings. We lament the breakdown of families while neglecting our own family responsibilities.

Jesus calls us to something more substantial than criticism. He calls us to faithful living.

This does not mean that Christians should withdraw from public life or avoid working for justice and the common good. The biblical prophets spoke directly to rulers and societies about oppression, corruption, and injustice. Christians should also care about the institutions and laws that affect their neighbors.

But lasting social faithfulness cannot be separated from personal moral faithfulness.

We are responsible for faithfulness, not for controlling history

There is a necessary qualification to this lesson.

The course of history is not simply the mathematical sum of individual choices. Institutions, laws, economic arrangements, political power, leadership, and

collective movements also shape societies. Some people possess far more influence than others. Sin can become embedded in systems that are difficult for individuals to change.

Furthermore, Scripture teaches that God remains sovereign over the nations (Psalm 22:28; Daniel 2:20–21; Acts 17:26). Human beings make meaningful decisions and bear responsibility for them, but history is not ultimately outside God's control.

This should keep us from both arrogance and despair.

We should not imagine that our personal faithfulness gives us control over the future of our nation. But neither should we conclude that ordinary obedience is pointless.

We may never know the full influence of a faithful life. A child taught to love God may influence his own children. A young person encouraged at a difficult moment may become a faithful parent, teacher, or leader. A business owner

who insists upon integrity may influence employees and customers for years.

The results may extend far beyond anything we can see.

The kingdom of God often advances through means that appear small to the world. We are called to be faithful, even when the results are not immediately visible.

We may not be able to determine the course of history, but we can faithfully influence the portion of the world God has placed within our reach.

Questions for reflection

1. What ordinary decisions by individuals do I believe have the greatest influence on the moral character of a society?
2. Am I more concerned about criticizing the condition of the world than about faithfully living as salt and light within it?
3. How can I seek the welfare of my community, as Jeremiah instructed the

exiles in Babylon?
4. What influence might my ordinary decisions have on the next generation?

Day 4

Finding Strength and Rest in the Ordinary Faithfulness of God

Releasing the burden of control and learning to trust the God who sustains all things

Primary Scripture: Matthew 6:25–34

Additional Scripture: Psalm 127:1–2; Psalm 131; 1 Kings 19:1–18; Isaiah 40:28–31; Philippians 4:4–9; Hebrews 4:9–11

There is something exhausting about believing that everything depends upon us.

We can feel responsible for our families, our work, our future, our church, our community, and even the direction of the world.

We recognize that our decisions matter, and we rightly want to make good ones. We understand that habits shape character and that ordinary actions can have consequences far beyond what we anticipate.

But there is a danger in taking these truths too far. We can begin to believe that because our actions matter, we must somehow control the results and everything depends on us.

We may feel that if we do not accomplish something extraordinary, we have failed. We may become discouraged when our efforts produce little visible change. We may worry about the future because we cannot guarantee that our ordinary acts of faithfulness will produce the results we desire.

Scripture offers a better foundation for our lives: God is at work, even when we

cannot see it, and the responsibility for sustaining the world does not rest upon our shoulders.

The God who feeds the birds

In Matthew 6:25–34, Jesus addresses one of the most common burdens of the human heart: anxiety about the necessities of life.

He tells his disciples not to be anxious about food, drink, or clothing. He directs their attention to the birds of the air and the flowers of the field.

The birds do not sow or reap or gather into barns, yet the heavenly Father feeds them. The flowers do not labor or spin, yet God clothes them with beauty.

Jesus is not teaching that people should abandon work or responsibility. Scripture consistently commends diligence and condemns laziness (Proverbs

6:6–11; 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12). Nor is he promising that believers will never experience hunger, poverty, or hardship.

His point is that our heavenly Father knows what we need. We are not forgotten, and we do not need to live as though the entire burden of providing for our lives rests upon us.

The birds are sustained by God's ordinary provision. They still search for food, but their lives exist within the care of their Creator.

We, too, are called to work, plan, provide, and make wise decisions. But we are also called to trust.

Jesus concludes this teaching with a familiar command: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

The Christian's first responsibility is not to control every possible outcome. It is to seek God's kingdom and remain faithful to him.

Elijah and the ministry of ordinary provision

The story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19 provides a particularly powerful illustration.

After his dramatic victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah receives a death threat from Jezebel. He flees into the wilderness, sits beneath a broom tree, and asks God to take his life.

His words reveal a man overwhelmed by fear and discouragement. He believes that he has failed, that the nation has rejected God, and that he alone remains faithful.

What does God do?

Before Elijah receives a new assignment or a fuller understanding of what God is doing, he receives rest and food.

An angel touches him and tells him to rise and eat. Elijah finds bread and water. He eats, drinks, and lies down again. The angel returns, provides for him once more, and tells him that the journey is too great for him.

This is a remarkable detail.

Elijah has just participated in one of the most extraordinary demonstrations of divine power in the Old Testament. Fire has fallen from heaven. The people have acknowledged the Lord. Rain has returned after a prolonged drought.

Yet in his moment of despair, God's first provision is not another spectacular miracle. It is food, water, and rest.

There is something deeply profound and comforting about this.

God does not treat Elijah as though he were a machine that simply needs to be sent back into service. He cares for him as a human being with real limitations.

The prophet who had stood boldly before kings needed to sleep. The man who had prayed for rain needed water. The servant who had witnessed God's power needed to be strengthened for the journey ahead.

The passage reminds us that our physical limitations are not necessarily signs of spiritual failure. We are creatures, not the Creator. We need sleep, food, companionship, encouragement, and rest.

God knows this.

You are not responsible for holding the world together

Psalm 127:1–2 offers another important reminder:

"Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."

The psalm continues by describing the futility of rising early, going late to rest, and eating the bread of anxious toil.

The point is not that work is unimportant. The Bible repeatedly calls us to diligence. Rather, the psalm warns against a life of anxious self-reliance.

We can work very hard and still fail to accomplish what we desire. We can make careful plans, but we cannot guarantee the future. We can invest in our families, our careers, and our ministries, but we cannot control the final results.

God calls us to be faithful, not omnipotent.

This distinction is essential for Christian rest.

There is a difference between taking responsibility for what God has placed before us and assuming responsibility for things that belong to God alone.

We are responsible for our decisions. We are responsible for our obedience. We are responsible for loving our neighbors and fulfilling our duties.

But we are not responsible for controlling every outcome, changing every person, solving every problem, or determining the course of history.

That belongs to God.

The peace of trusting God with tomorrow

Jesus concludes Matthew 6 by telling his disciples not to be anxious about

tomorrow, because tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

This is not an instruction to ignore the future. Scripture commends wise planning (Proverbs 21:5) and responsible preparation (Proverbs 6:6–8). But planning is different from anxiety.

Planning recognizes that we have responsibilities today. Anxiety often imagines that we must somehow solve tomorrow before it arrives.

Philippians 4:6–7 tells believers to bring their requests to God in prayer and thanksgiving. The promise is that God's peace, which surpasses understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Notice that Paul does not promise that every circumstance will immediately change. He promises God's peace in the midst of circumstances.

That is the strength we need.

We can do the work God has given us today without carrying the impossible burden of controlling the future. We can make faithful decisions without demanding that we see every result. We can plant seeds and trust God with the harvest.

We can rest because God does not rest from sustaining his creation.

A life of faithfulness without the burden of control

Perhaps one of the greatest lessons we can learn from Elijah is that God's purposes were not dependent upon Elijah's ability to accomplish everything himself.

Elijah believed he was alone. God revealed that seven thousand had not bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Elijah believed his ministry had come to an end. God gave him further work and provided Elisha as a successor.

God was at work in ways Elijah could not see.

The same is true for us. We may not see the results of our faithfulness. We may not know how God will use our words, our habits, our service, or our decisions. We may never see the full influence of the ordinary acts of obedience we practice throughout our lives.

But we do not need to see everything to trust God.

Our calling is to be faithful in the ordinary circumstances of life, to seek his kingdom, and to trust him with the results.

We can sleep because he remains awake. We can rest because he continues to work. We can face tomorrow because he is already there.

The God who sustains the sun, sends the rain, feeds the birds, and

preserves his people does not need us to hold the world together. He calls us to trust him and faithfully do the work he has placed before us.

Questions for reflection

1. Where in my life am I carrying a burden that ultimately belongs to God?
2. Do I confuse faithfulness with the ability to control outcomes?
3. What can I learn from God's provision of food and rest for Elijah in 1 Kings 19?
4. What would it look like for me to practice genuine trust in God today rather than worrying about tomorrow?

Day 5

Thanks to Sylvester Warsaw, Jr for our devotional today

Scripture clearly warns all called by His name about the danger of walking by sight and not faith and this truth is clearly stated in Proverbs 3:5-8 among many other Scriptures in the Bible. There is a danger that jades our understanding and perception of God when we lean unto our own understanding. Scripture calls this trespassing because of venturing into the

unknown without knowledge and understanding based on our own finite perception which is limited. This was the issue with Elijah in 1 Kings 18:20-19:18 leaning unto his own understanding. If I counted correctly three times Elijah stated he alone was left in Israel when in fact Obadiah in 1 Kings 18:13 told him that he had hid one hundred men of the LORD'S prophets fifty to a cave and had fed them. Elijah even mocked the prophets of Baal. Leaning unto our own understanding leads to self righteousness because it becomes I and not God. In 1 Kings 19:18 God told Elijah that He had seven thousand in Israel whose knees didn't bow down to Baal. In Mark 9:38-41 and Luke 9:46-50 Jesus's disciples had the issue of self righteousness because of what they saw but didn't understand and Jesus had to correct them of their exclusionism. None of us called by His name escape the sin of trespass. This is precisely why when Jesus's disciples asked Him to teach them to pray the prayer says "forgive us of our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Proverbs 23:7 tells us, "so as a man thinks in his heart, so is he." David in Psalm 51:10 asked God to "create in him a clean heart." The heart is where we live and it's the heart that Christ Jesus looks at and judges. Daily God invites His children to enter into His faithfulness by responding to His love in obedience by picking up the cross of obedience and following Him. In Galatians 2:20 is recorded this truth, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Protecting your heart allows you to see and hear God more clearly which frees us to walk in His obedience. Remember to lean not unto your own understanding but acknowledge Him in all our ways not just some but all

because He means all just like He said in Proverbs 3:5-8. For the battle isn't against flesh and blood but spiritual 1 Samuel 17:47 and Ephesians 6:10-20.