

# Back to the Altar



SCAN FOR AUDIO

**What** do you do when others look to you for spiritual leadership and you are tired, weary, and worn? Do you pretend your strength is invincible? Do you put on an act that you are untouched by discouragement, trials, and darkness?

Elijah the prophet stood unflinchingly before a vast crowd of past believers in the living God. His voice sounded like a trumpet across Mount Carmel, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word” (1 Kgs 18:21).<sup>1</sup>

Throwing caution to the wind, Elijah eyed the broken-down altar of the living God. He knew what he must do. He called out to all the people, “Come near to me.” So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar to the Lord which had been torn down” (1 Kgs 18:30).

While the crowd stared sullenly, the lone prophet dug a trench around the altar. Thoughtfully, he placed the wood on the altar, butchered an ox, and placed it on the wood. He stepped back and eyed the altar, the wood, and the sacrifice covered with the relentless dust blowing from more than three years of drought.

He commanded that four pitchers of precious water be poured over the sacrifice. The water soaked the bloody sacrifice and dripped onto the wood. He ordered four more pitchers of water to be poured out over the sacrifice, and the tinder-dry wood soaked up the water. He called for four more pitchers of water, and the water streamed down the sides of the altar and filled the trench . . . and the people wondered if the prophet of the living God had lost his mind.



At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said,

“O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.” Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God” (1 Kgs 18:36–39).

Later that same day, Elijah prayed seven times for rain to come upon a land that had received no rain in response to the prayers of seven thousand faithful believers. The prophet prayed and prayed until one small cloud appeared over the Mediterranean Sea, and he immediately had his servant inform King Ahab that he must leave the mountain before the heavy rains stopped him.

As the rain fell in torrents, it was Elijah who ran in front of the king's chariot. The prophet ran mile after mile through the mud, down the mountain, and all the way to Jezreel. It appeared that nothing could stop Elijah.

But wet, weary, and hungry, the prophet faced an unexpected obstacle: the wrath of Queen Jezebel. She sent him this message: “So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.” And he

was afraid and arose and ran for his life” (1 Kgs 19:2, 3).

He ran and ran and ran until he could run no more. How could such a mighty man of God run away from one threat from an angry woman after refusing to fear Ahab's accusations or the unsmiling faces of a vast crowd of unbelievers? Where was God in all of this?

Elijah ran into the wilderness, sat down under a juniper tree, and begged God to take his life. He felt discouraged by the angry threat of the queen when he had hoped for an immediate national revival. He was wading through a deep spiritual and emotional darkness. The tired prophet fell fast asleep.

Into that spiritual darkness came an angel sent by God. The angel touched him and told him, “Arise, eat.” Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again” (1 Kgs 19:5–6). God sent an angel again and again. God provided the run-away prophet with food and fresh water. With that God-given nourishment, Elijah hiked all the way to Horeb, which was called the mountain of God.

It was there in a cave on Mount Horeb that God cried out to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kgs 19:9). It was and continues to be a powerful question.

Are you tired, weary, and worn? Are you discouraged by what God's people are saying about you or to you? Are you disillusioned with the walls and ceilings you are running up against in doing what God has called you to do in the church? God asks you, elder in the church or leader in the congregation, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Why are you sitting in the darkness when you know the God of the Light? What made you lose your grip on the One who loves you the most and forget how He led

you in the past? What must you do now, while all you may be seeing is darkness?

Here are some practical steps to live at the altar of God when you are exhausted or discouraged:

### 1. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith” (Heb 12:1, 2).

a. *Look for a fresh picture of Jesus each morning as you read His written Word.* He is the One who is with you in your storm. He is the One who will never leave you. He is the One who will grow your faith at the very time Satan hopes to destroy your faith in the Lord Jesus.

b. *Praise Jesus for who He is.* Sing and pray praise to the Lord. Praising God is a powerful weapon against darkness and discouragement.

### 2. Remember that God runs with you in your darkness.

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isa 43:2, 3). Train your mind to claim God's promises of His presence through your day.

### 3. Notice how He cares for you when you have nothing.

“And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19). Make a prayer journal and record how God is providing for you. Tell others of His care for you.

**4. Listen to His answers.** “Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer 33:3). Take time after you study God’s Word and pray to be still and to listen to what the Holy Spirit has to say about what you read. Test all you hear by the written Word of God.

**5. Return in His power.** “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Zech 4:6). Re-engage with your ministry as an elder with a fresh dependence on the power and leading of the Holy Spirit.

**6. Refuse to let discouragement or failures define you.** “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Satan wants you to look back at all your failures. The Lord Jesus calls you to look forward to all He has called you to be and to do by His great grace and power!

**7. Pour your life into your God-given Elisha.** “Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place” (1 Kgs 19:16). Ask God for the name of a young person of your own gender that you can mentor to do what God has called you to do. Raise up a young leader by the power of the Lord to replace you!

Elder, find courage and joy in the following inspiration!

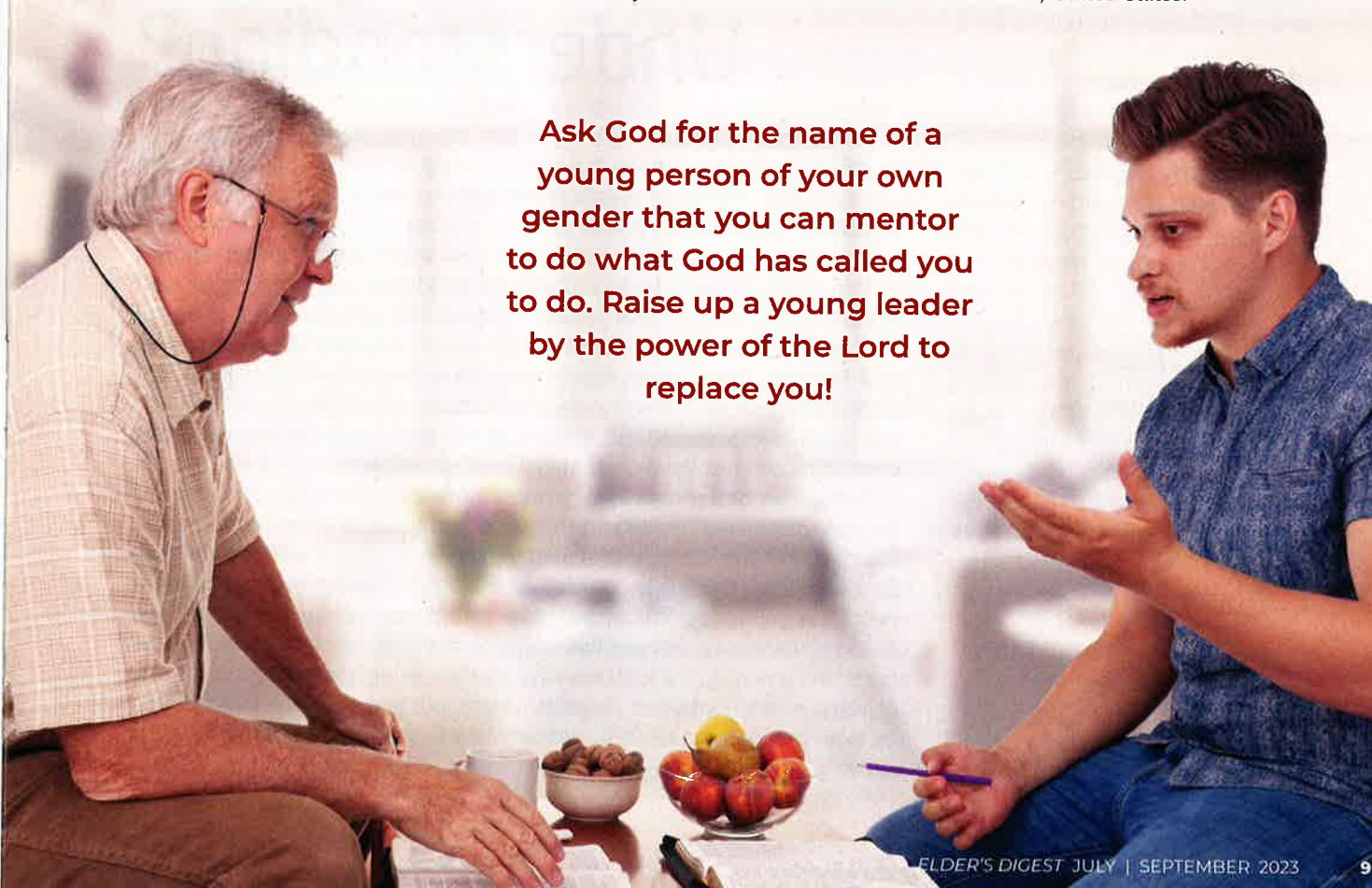
For the disheartened there is a sure remedy—faith, prayer, work. Faith and activity will impart assurance and satisfaction that will increase day by day. Are you tempted to give way to feelings of anxious foreboding or utter despondency? In the darkest days, when appearances seem most forbidding, fear not. Have faith in God. He knows your need. He has all power. His infinite love and compassion never weary. Fear not that He will

fail of fulfilling His promise. He is eternal truth. Never will He change the covenant He has made with those who love Him. And He will bestow upon His faithful servants the measure of efficiency that their need demands. The apostle Paul has testified: “He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. . . . Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10.<sup>2</sup> ED

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise marked, all Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the NASB.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917), 164.

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