

## Maximum Load Limit!

**Intro:** Driving down the road you see the sign "Maximum Load Limit". That means that the bridge you are crossing can safely hold so much weight and no more. Do you ever feel as if the bridge of your life has been crossed by circumstances that far outweigh your capacity to hold them up? Did ever wish you could hold up a sign that says, "I'm carrying enough! No more!" Today let's revisit together a familiar text about a man who felt just that way; and who learned how God can help us through the personal crises of our lives. It is the story of Elijah in 1 Kg. 19.

You remember what Elijah had done on Mt. Carmel. A wonderful victory for God, a demonstration of uncommon faith and power in the midst of opposition. Elijah seems bigger than life; all of that is about to change.

### Elijah's Maximum Load Limit!

*Elijah's euphoria is quickly met by the anger of the wicked Jezebel! Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "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." (1 Kings 19:1-2) Her threatening words of doom knocked the props right out from under Elijah! It is hard for us to realize sometimes that even the people we see as spiritual giants can be brought to their knees in discouragement. And if so, how much more all the rest of us who face the challenges of life each day! And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. (1 Kings 19:1-3) What Elijah saw was the fact that for all the good he had accomplished at Mt. Carmel he had made no headway with those who held ultimate sway over the affairs of Israel from the human standpoint! Israel was still in the control of the wicked pair and Elijah knew Jezebel's threat was not mere idle words! He ran for his life from Samaria to Beersheba. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." (1 Kings 19:4) How do you think Elijah feels? Afraid, discouraged, helpless. He falls into despair and begs for relief from the burden of his life! He feels he has failed. Can you relate to those feelings? Is there one of us who has not known the frustration and helplessness Elijah was feeling?*

### Lifting the Load (Attending to the physical)

*Elijah was physically and mentally exhausted--out of resources! And immediately God started to work on Elijah! First, he attended to the physical.*

*And he lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to 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 Kings 19:5-6)*

### **Lifting the Load (Attending to the spiritual)**

#### ***WE NEED TO REMEMBER GOD'S PAST DEEDS***

And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. (1 Kings 19:7-8) Perhaps we might wonder why this place? Horeb was a place rich with memories for the faithful. It was here that God made His covenant with the Israelite people. It was here that God had promised to be their God and to provide their needs. It was here that God had revealed His grace to His disobedient people in giving them manna from heaven for 40 years. It was here that Moses their great leader Moses wandered with these disobedient people not for a mere 40 days, but for 40 long years!

Now coming perhaps to the very place from Moses centuries before had been given the Law of God and had seen the glory of the Lord, Elijah now like a second "Moses" would hear the voice of God. God begins with a question.

Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9)

His purpose is not to gain information but to solicit a free expression of the prophet Elijah's concerns.

And he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:10)

#### ***WE NEED TO EXPRESS IN PRAYER OUR PRESENT NEEDS***

Elijah poured out his heart to God. He needed to get his feelings of discouragement out in the open. In Elijah's speech you hear three classic signs of spiritual fatigue:

**Self-criticism** (you get down on yourself).

**Feelings of foolishness and ineffectiveness** (you begin to think you aren't any good at what you've done).

**Loneliness** (you begin to feel that you are alone against the world).

And in a subtle way he felt abandoned by God. Why Lord have you allowed this? Why have you not been as zealous to destroy those who have destroyed the prophets? Why not destroy all those wicked Israelites?

#### ***WE NEED TO REAFFIRM GOD'S POWERFUL PRESENCE***

So He said, “Go forth, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. (1 Kings 19:11-12)

These verses have always been fascinating and puzzling to me. God urges Elijah to stand on the mountain before him as He passes by. It is reminiscent of an event in the life of Moses when God made a similar revelation of Himself. This time God chooses to communicate not by words about Himself but deeds. By this profound object lesson, God revealed to Elijah that He had great power to destroy every enemy that rose against Him; but that He also had the power to comfort and bless those who were faithful to Him. Just as the fire, earthquake and strong wind symbolize the wrath and destructive power of the Almighty, so this symbol reminds us of the quiet and patient love and long-suffering of God toward sinful people.

Elijah is again allowed to give expression to his burden but this time from the perspective of one who realizes that God works in his own way and not our own.

Then he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” (1 Kings 19:14)

#### ***WE NEED TO KEEP BELIEVING IN GOD’S PLAN***

And the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. “And it shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. “Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:15-18)

It is important to see how that in these words God was making clear to Elijah that He had been aware of everything that had happened and that His plan was unfolding. Sometimes we get impatient with God; but He is saying to Elijah, “I’ve gotten everything under control. I just have a different time table!”

God responded to Elijah’s righteous indignation. He reveals that He has already ordained those who will serve as agents of His wrath against the wicked Ahab, Jezebel, and the wicked of Israel.

God responded to Elijah’s loneliness and sense of helplessness. His work had not been in vain. There were still people that

would be influenced to serve God faithfully. Elijah's life would not have been lived in vain.

And so often we need to reaffirm in our hearts that God is still in control and that everything will work out according to His plan. We just have to keep trusting in Him and doing our part to make it succeed!

**Conclusion: Through God's help Elijah carried the load life had given him. So can we. God can turn our spiritual discouragement into renewed courage, our doubt into stronger faith. When you reach maximum load limit, remember the formula and let God lift the load!**

**With the Lord's help we can believe as we sing. "As I journey here through the toil and tears, there's a rainbow in the cloud, he will safely lead I must have no fears, there's a rainbow in the cloud."**