**Elijah Committed ° Courageous ° Common Week 8**

Our study this week stands alone since we had a guest speaker sharing this past Sunday, but we want to continue to look at Elijah and his restoration. Chapter 19 finished with a very unassuming picture of that restoration. If you blink, you’ll probably miss it (I know I did for several days). Consider again the last 4 verses that we looked at: ***15 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; 16 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. 17 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. 18 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."***

The more I’ve contemplated these seemingly unusual methods of restoration, the more it makes sense to me. After all, what do you have to do in order to bring someone of Elijah’s experience back to a place of service to God? He’s got the training (Cherith and Zarephath), he’s had the experience (Zarephath, Mt. Carmel and Mt. Sinai) and now he just needs a reason and a shove in the right direction. God gives him that and more in these 3 verses. Purpose, a friend and encouragement – that is God’s method of restoration for Elijah. Any of these things on their own are certainly capable of making a difference in someone’s life – all of them together work to snap Elijah back to reality.

As you think back over the course of your life, how many people have you encountered who were just absolutely beat down by life’s circumstances? Some of them were simply lying in the beds they had made (reaping what they’d sown), others were just on the bad end of someone else’s bad decision and then there are those who just seem to be dealt a bad card when it comes to health or finances. Whatever the background, we’ve probably all been on one side of the other and the emotional rollercoaster that comes with it.

I can think back on two particular instances in the past 5 or so years. I’m sure there were more, but these two come to mind. One instance had to do with a 15 year old in my previous youth group having a stroke and the other a gentleman losing his family, home and everything else because of an addiction he’d never sought help for. In both situations I found myself in a position to minister to these folks and as I recall my time with them and I try to pinpoint a time where there was a distinct turnaround, I can’t think of one. Yet both of them in the year or so after thanked me for caring and encouraging and being a friend and helping them to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I guess that at the end of the day, I was simply available – that went a long way.

We’re introduced in Acts 4 to a man named Barnabas (which translated means “son of encouragement.” Other translations substitute encouragement with comfort or consolation. All these words have a similar meaning, but I’d like us to consider this week just one of the methods that God used in His restoration of Elijah and see how we might employ similar methods when dealing with people inside and outside the body of Believers.

Alan Carr has some insightful things to say regarding Barnabas and his methods that are particularly helpful as we consider the benefits of encouragement. He says that as encouragers, we must learn to “reach out, reach up, and reach in.”

**“Reach out** - Acts 9:26-27 - *The glorious conversion of Saul of Tarsus*. After Saul was converted, he tried to unite himself with the other disciples who were in Jerusalem, but out of fear and prejudice about his past, they were afraid to allow him into their group. However, Barnabas came to Saul’s side and stood up for Him and told the others about this man’s amazing conversion. He stood up for one who desperately needed a friend.

There is still a need for this kind of ministry today! We need to make the effort and take the time to reach out to those around us who seem to be lonely or who have been rejected by others. This is especially true at church. Every person who darkens these doors should feel like they have returned home after a long absence! We need to love them, welcome them and accept them into our services!

**Does this describe your life and practice?** We ought to find ourselves actively engaged in this kind of activity. Look around you! There are plenty of lonely, outcast people. Find them and be a friend to someone who needs a friend. That is what Jesus did! It is what He expects of us.)

**Reach up** - The encourager has an upward ministry. His work doesn’t merely reach out to those around him, but it also reaches up as he carries out the work God has given him to do in this life.)

The Encourager Furthers The Work Of God – The encourager uses his spiritual gifts and love for the Lord and the Lord’s people to see that the work of the Lord is carried out in this world.

Acts 4:36-37 He Promotes the Work of God - The first impression we are given of Barnabas is that he is a man who gave of himself freely. He gave of his goods to see that the church and its work went on. He used the things at his disposal to enhance the work of the Lord.

**Does this describe your life and practice?** We ought to all strive to give of our time, our tithes and our talents so that the church can prosper and that the burden of ministry doesn’t rest upon the shoulders of one or two. When we give of ourselves and our stuff as we should, others are then encouraged to do the same.)

**Reach in** - The encourager possesses an internal ministry, a ministry to self. It is from this ministry to his own spiritual needs that the encourager is able to demonstrate the reality of Jesus Christ to those around him. While one’s personal ministry cannot be seen by others, the evidence is plain for all to behold. This was true in the life of Barnabas and it will be true in your life and mine as well.)

Acts 11:24 An Encourager Demonstrates Christ by His Life - This verse indicates that Barnabas was a genuine man of God. He possessed all the characteristics that marked him as being sold out and on fire for the Lord. His life served as an encouragement to holiness by being holy and blameless.

Our lives should stand as an encouragement to lead others deeper into their walk with the Lord. We do this by getting ourselves as close to God as can. When others see the Lord working in and through our lives, they will be challenged and encouraged to seek the Lord for themselves and to become more like Him. God’s promise to us is that when we strive to get closer to Him, He will come closer to us - James 4:8.”

So, brothers and sisters, can we take these things to heart and be agents of encouragement to those around us that are in desperate need? These thoughts just scratch the surface – **what else can we practically do to be salt, light and hope to those around us both inside and outside the Body?**

Memory verse: “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” Eph. 4:29 (ESV)