

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, April 6, 2022 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



INTRODUCTION

“Building A Persevering Faith”
Hebrews 11:1-40, 1 Kings 19:15-21

What is persevering faith? Listen to this quote from **Oswald Chambers** in his classic work, **“My Utmost for His Highest,”** and see if you can define what “persevering faith” is...

“Perseverance means more than endurance— more than simply holding on until the end. A saint’s life is in the hands of God like a bow and arrow in the hands of an archer. God is aiming at something the saint cannot see, but our Lord continues to stretch and strain, and every once in a while the saint says, “I can’t take any more.” Yet God pays no attention; He goes on stretching until His purpose is in sight, and then He lets the arrow fly. Entrust yourself to God’s hands. Is there something in your life for which you need perseverance right now? Maintain your intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through the perseverance of faith. Proclaim as Job did, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15). Faith is not some weak and pitiful emotion, but is strong and vigorous confidence built on the fact that God is holy love. And even though you cannot see Him right now and cannot understand what He is doing, you know *Him*. Disaster occurs in your life when you lack the mental composure that comes from establishing yourself on the eternal truth that God is holy love. Faith is the supreme effort of your life— throwing yourself with abandon and total confidence upon God.” – Oswald Chamber, “My Utmost for His Highest”

How do you build a persevering faith? Faith in God enables men and women to make great choices — choices that can affect not only themselves, but all of history. Hebrews chapter 11 is filled with examples of faithful men and women who have gone before us. We’re familiar with it (**READ: HEBREWS 11**) Here’s just a few examples from the great faith chapter:

‘By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family’ (Heb. 11:7).

‘By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going’ (Hebrews 11:8).

‘By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict’ (Hebrews 11:23).

‘By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient’ (Hebrews 11:31).

One important element to be noticed when reading about these great men and women is that their faith was accompanied, and ultimately strengthened, by difficulties. In other words it was a “persevering faith.” When we’re in the midst of a difficult time, reading and reflecting upon Hebrews chapter 11 will help us find encouragement and strength from those who’ve gone through tough times and did so faithfully.

Here are seven strategies that will help us gain the strength we need to persevere in faith...

7 Strategies for Building a Persevering Faith:

1. **Honestly express your emotions to God** - We may be hesitant to talk with God about what we are really feeling, but God can handle it! 1 Peter 5:7 instructs us to, *‘Cast all your anxiety (your cares) on him because he cares for you.’*
2. **Fight the temptation to run from your distress** - When going through difficult times, we’re often confronted with the temptation to try to get back to *‘normal’*. We need to resist this temptation because it hinders our ability and resolve to faithfully face the issues at hand; and threatens to keep us from benefiting from the redemptive by-products that God brings about through life’s difficulties.
3. **Resist trying harder** - God may remove us from activity during this time to slow us down. Rushing back into a life of frantic activity is likely the opposite of what God wants us to do. Rest, solitude, and silence can allow us to hear His voice.
4. **Seek companions** - This is a good time to reach out to spiritually mature friends who are good and patient listeners and who will listen and provide the wisdom we need.
5. **Be faithful, but release your expectations** - We need to let go of our preconceived expectations regarding how God may or may not respond to us. This puts us in a posture of openness and receptivity to His leading.
6. **Be patient with yourself and with God** - These periods can last for months or longer. The deeper changes at which God may be aiming take time. Pray for eyes to see the stronger future God is bringing about.
7. **Call to mind God’s faithfulness** - Recalling God’s provision and leading in the past can steady us during potentially disorienting times.

Hold on to this truth, *“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 1:6)

Elisha was such a man. He had a persevering faith through difficult time and through a difficult ministry to Israel during his day. The take aways from Elisha’s life can be many and varied... his obedience and surrender to God will/call on his life, his sacrifice in leaving his all behind to follow God call on his life, his unique companionship with perhaps the greatest prophet of Israel of all time (Elijah) and his comforting friend and encouragement to Elijah at his lowest point (everyone can use a friend in their low moments), and then there is his persistent and persevering faith. Elijah was truly the greatest prophet Israel had ever seen, but Elisha is equally and uniquely great and

powerful as a prophet of God in his own right. Remember his request in 2 Kings 2:9, “*Elisha said, ‘Please let a double portion of your spirit (Elijah) be upon me.’*” And he was going to need that... a double portion of persevering faith. This study will lean into the persevering faith of Elisha to see if that “double portion” come about.

The place to begin is to meet our man. Elisha may emerge in the shadows of the great prophet Elijah, and his life certainly contrast that prophets life in many ways, but as we shall see when Elijah left the scene, God had another man in line to carry on His work... and his name was Elisha. Let’s meet this powerful prophet of God.

*¹And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. ²Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.” ³And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. ⁴But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a ^[a]broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!” ⁵Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an ^[b]angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise and eat.” ⁶Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on ^[c]coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷And the ^[d]angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.” ⁸So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁰So he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” ¹¹Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces 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; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire ^[e]a still small voice. ¹³So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁴And he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” ¹⁵Then the LORD said to him: “Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. ¹⁶Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. ¹⁷It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. ¹⁸Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” ¹⁹**So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him.** ²⁰**And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?”** ²¹**So Elisha turned back from him, and***

took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant. -1 Kings 19:1-21 (NKJV)*focus vv.19

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ELISHA AND ELIJAH

Although Elisha would pick up the mantle of Elijah, his predecessor and teacher, and theirs was the continuing work of God among His people; they were uniquely different as men and as prophets. Perhaps this serves as important reminder to us that God uses all kinds, different personalities and different gifts to accomplish his purposes. As we fill out the following change comparing and contrasting Elijah and Elisha consider what these differences may teach us about the work of God.

ELIJAH & ELISHA COMPARE AND CONTRAST CHART

TRAIT	ELIJAH	ELISHA
<i>Personality</i>	Elijah was <u>fiery</u> and <u>destructive</u> (think confrontation of Ahab and Jezebel and Mt. Carmel)	Elisha was more <u>compassionate</u> and <u>merciful</u>
<i>Ministry Focus</i>	Elijah's ministry focus was more <u>prophetic</u> in demonstration of the power of God	Elisha's ministry was more focused on <u>performing miracles</u> that proclaimed the power of God
<i>Ministry Work</i>	Elijah would do <u>powerful work</u> in the name of God	Elisha would do <u>double the work</u> of Elijah in the name of God
<i>Ministry Message</i>	Elijah was a messenger of <u>vengeance</u>	Elisha was a messenger of <u>mercy</u>

<i>Death</i>	Elijah didn't die, rather was transported to heaven in a <u>whirlwind</u> ... An exciting and miraculous departure from this earthly life to heaven	Elisha died a <u>natural death</u> due to <u>illness</u> . However, such was the power God gave him, that his deceased body brought a dead person back to life when it came into contact with him
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Again this look at these two great prophets in contrast gives us some encouragements and reminders about who God uses and about the work of God. Consider these important reminders about your usefulness to God.

5 Important Consideration for Your Usefulness to God:

1. Your usefulness to God and His kingdom work is not determined by your limitations -
2. Your usefulness to God and His kingdom work is not determined by your personality -
3. Your usefulness to God and His kingdom work is not determined by your giftedness -
4. Your usefulness to God and His kingdom work is not determined by your strengths and/or weaknesses –
5. Your usefulness to God and His kingdom work is determined by your full dependence and reliance on God and His work -

ELISHA AND CHRIST

Interestingly, Elisha has been recognized as a “pointer to Christ.” Elisha does not appear to have given any specifically Messianic prophecies, but we will see that the whole ministry of Elisha does indeed have many allusions and comparisons to that of Christ, thus pointing to the Messiah. Jesus himself pointed out the parallel when he said in his own defence in Luke 4:24-27, “²⁴ Then He (Jesus) said, “Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country (speaking of Himself)... ²⁷ And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian (a comparison to Elisha).”

In Jesus' times the Jewish people expected the great prophet Elijah to come again – and, in Matthew's gospel, Jesus suggests that this has happened in John the Baptist. He says to his disciples, ‘If you are willing to accept it, John is Elijah who is to come.’

Accepting this, people began to ask whether Jesus – who seemed to continue the ministry that John the Baptist had started – was Elisha, the even greater prophet who succeeded Elijah.

It's an interesting question. And, when we read the Old Testament stories about Elisha, we see many similarities between Jesus and Elisha. Here are ten of them...

10 Similarities Between Jesus and Elisha:

1. Their names have similar meanings - Elisha means ‘God is salvation.’ Jesus means ‘Yahweh will save.’
2. Their ministries both start at the Jordan River - Elisha takes up the mantle of Elijah at the River Jordan and starts his ministry. Jesus is baptised by John at the River Jordan and starts his ministry. Elisha sees the heavens open and Elijah being taken up in a whirlwind and then

receives a ‘double portion’ of the Holy Spirit. At Jesus’ baptism John sees the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove.

3. **They both raised a woman’s adult son from the dead** - Elisha raises the son of the ‘Shunaammite woman’ from the dead. Jesus raises the son of the ‘widow of Nain’ from the dead.
4. **They both fed large numbers with a small quantities of food** - Elisha feeds 100 men with a few barley loaves and there is food left over. Jesus, on two occasions, feeds 5000 and then 4000 with a few loaves and fishes and there is food left over.
5. **They both turned a small quantity of liquid into an abundance** - Elisha turns a small amount of oil into enough oil to fill every vessel in the community. Jesus turns water into huge quantities of wine.
6. **They both healed lepers** - Elisha heals Naaman, the Syrian commander, of leprosy. Jesus heals many lepers.
7. **They both made things that should sink, float** - Elisha makes an iron axe head float. Jesus walks on water and enables his disciple Peter to walk on water.
8. **They were both betrayed for love of money** - Elisha is betrayed by his servant Gehazi because Gehazi sees an opportunity to make money from betrayal. Jesus is betrayed by his disciple Judas because Judas sees an opportunity to make money from betrayal.
9. **They both gave sight to the blind** - Elisha first blinds his enemies and then restores their sight. Jesus often restores sight to the blind.
10. **Their deaths both brought new life** - Elisha’s tomb was a place of resurrection. Raiders interrupted a burial and the body was thrown hastily into Elisha’s tomb. On touching Elisha’s bones, the dead person came back to life. Jesus’ tomb was a place of resurrection. He himself was raised to life and brought the promise of new life to all.

It’s fascinating to see all these parallels and how the ministry of Elijah points forward to the time when the will of God would be revealed uniquely and fully through the person of Jesus Christ. The ministries of Elisha and Jesus share similarities – not that surprisingly, as they both lived their lives in relationship with God. But Jesus, as God’s son, lives fully in relationship with God in a way that no other has or can. This is why, as Christians, we believe that God is completely revealed in Jesus.

A PROFILE OF ELISHA’S LIFE AND TIMES (1 Kings 19:1-21)

Those comparisons and contrasts certainly give us a unique perspective on this great and perhaps a bit lesser known prophet. They also inspire a deeper study of his life to catch the relevance and application for our lives as believers. As we begin our study of this amazing prophet of God, let just lay some ground work by taking a look at a profile of the prophet Elisha’s life. These things should be kept in mind as we explore the persevering faith of this great prophet of God.

Let’s look again at our passage in 1 Kings 19:19-21 and the first time we really meet the great prophet Elisha (READ: 1 Kings 19:19-21)

¹⁹ So he (Elijah) departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. ²⁰ And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him,

“Go back again, for what have I done to you?” ²¹ So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen’s equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant. -1 Kings 19:19-21 (NKJV)

Elisha’s Profile in 5 Important Glimpses of His Life:

1. The name Elisha means “God is Salvation” and gives us an idea of the purpose of His ministry (v.19) -
2. Elisha was the son of a farmer named Shaphat, and was himself a farmer when God called him (v.19) –
3. Elisha was from the town of Abel-Meholah in Israel which means “Meadow of Dancing” which may reflect something of Elisha’s personality (*which was one of compassion, mercy and joy*) (v.19) – That is where Elijah found Elisha plowing the fields. Verse 16 tell us the was from Abel-Meholah, “...*And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.*” Remember that where as Elijah had been more firey and stern as a prophet, Elisha was characterized as being somewhat kinder, more joyful, full of compassion and mercy, which we shall see in our study of his life.
4. Elisha’s call to ministry was from God not man, and was issued through the Prophet Elijah (v.19) – An important note here is that Elijah didn’t call Elisha, God did. Elijah, throughout his ministry was simple the messenger of God, and no less here was Elijah the messenger to Elisha of God’s call on his life. Look up at verse 16 in 1 Kings 19, “*Also you (Elijah) shall appoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.*” God calls! If you are not called of God, but rather called by man your ministry will fail.
5. When God called Elisha he surrendered his life fully to God’s call, no turning back (v.20-21) – Listen to it again in our passage in verses 20-21, “²⁰ *And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” ²¹ So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen’s equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.*” Some have questioned Elisha’s reluctance to follow as indicated in verse 20 by his desire to turn back and kiss his mother and father. But that is a misread of this passage. Notice more importantly in verse 21 that Elisha indicated his fully surrender to God’s call on his life with not turning back by the fact that he slaughtered his work animals and burned his plows in order to dedicate his life to God in worship and adoration... and surrender. He burned up his previous work equipment to surrender himself to God. He had nothing to go back to. Elisha was a fully surrendered prophet of God. He was all in... and that is what it take to build an persevering faith.

One more important fact about Elisha’s life that might be of interest to you and that set’s him apart from other prophets in the Old Testament... Elisha was incredibly blessed by God. He did more miracles in the Old Testament than anyone except Moses.

CONCLUSION

Elisha had three marked characteristics that set him up to have a persevering faith... the title of our study of Elisha’s life. If you want to build a persevering faith in your take note of these things.

3 Characteristics of a Life of Persevering Faith:

1. **He was fully dependent on God and that gave him a persevering faith** – He was not dependent on Elijah or any man to supply Him with what he needed. He was called of God, not man, and not even the greatest prophet Israel had ever known. He knew the source of Elijah's strength had been his total dependence on God and it would be his too.
2. **He was fully committed to God and that enabled him to live by persevering faith** – As we saw last week in Elijah's death, Elisha followed him from place to place without turning back. He was fully committed to God's call. This will be significant as we navigate Elisha's life in this study. Remember Elisha is known as the great miracle-working prophet. Those miracles reflect a life fully committed to the God who works miracles.
3. **He was fully surrendered to God and that kept him anchored to a persevering faith** – He surrendered his all to God when God called Him. Elisha was willing to follow God's call all the way, as previously stated, for he cut off all possibilities of returning to the farm, when he used the wooden plow he was handling in the field as fuel for the fire, and the team of oxen that pulled his plow, as the sacrificial offering for the celebration of his new call for service. He left mother, father, hometown (a dancing meadow) and his previous occupation to follow God.