

Old Testament Characters: Elijah – Used by God

Goldstone Church – 05-Jun-16 10:30am

1 Kings 17:1-24

Introduction

We are continuing our series looking at various Old Testament characters; looking at what made these people ‘tick’, and how God used them for His purposes. This is the first of 2 weeks looking at the life of Elijah.

It’s interesting that, although God used Elijah in many wonderful and powerful ways, we are told very little about his background. He suddenly appears in 1 Kings 17, with the simplest of introductions: “*Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead*”.

Like Tishbe, Elijah’s origins are unknown. There’s nothing in the Bible about Elijah’s parents, his family tree, his training or even his early life. He is just ‘Elijah the Prophet’. Nevertheless, in 1 Kings 17, we see that Elijah had several characteristics that allowed him to be used by God.

1. Being “Used by God” means being a
SPEAKER FOR GOD (v.1a)

“[Elijah] *said to Ahab*”. Elijah spoke to Ahab.

Speaking is an essential part of being used by God. The good news is everyone here can speak; we are all able to open our mouths, form words and sentences, and communicate with each other.

So, why is it so difficult to speak for God? Why is it that, when someone asks us about our relationship with God, our mouths go dry, we get tongue-tied, and our favourite words become “errr” and “ummm”?

A key quality for being used by God, is to be a speaker for God. God chooses to work out his purposes through what we say – and how we say it.

2. Being “Used by God” means being an
OBEYER OF GOD (v.5a)

“*So [Elijah] did*”. Elijah obeyed what God told him to do.

Obedience is an essential part of being used by God. This is echoed in John 14:15; Jesus himself said to his disciples, “*If you love me, you will obey what I command*”. In other words, obedience is a “measuring stick” of how much we love God.

A key quality for being used by God, is to obey what God tells us to do; not through gritted teeth, but as an act of love and devotion.

3. Being “Used by God” means being a
DWELLER WITH GOD (v.5b)

“[Elijah went] *and stayed there*”. Elijah rested and remained – he dwelt in the place where God told him to go. He stayed and rested in God’s presence.

One of the biggest challenges in our society is to rest and remain. Our culture loves to fill up every moment of every day with something; insisting that we must be doing something - even on holiday.

There's nothing wrong in being active and productive, but it seems that we are fast becoming "human-doings", rather than "human-beings".

A key quality for being used by God is to stay and remain in God's presence - to *be* with God. To spend time and get to know God; to build up a relationship with Him and to *dwell* in God's presence.

4. Being "Used by God" means being a
FOLLOWER OF GOD (v.10a)

"So [Elijah] *went*". Elijah followed God's travel directions.

It might seem strange to think of God as a 'Divine Travel Agent', but this might help us to read Psalm 23 in a slightly different way. King David wrote (Psalm 23:3b) "*He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.*"

So, when God leads and guides, it makes sense to follow where God leads and guides. Then we will be in the right location for when God wants to use us.

5. Being "Used by God" means being an
ENGAGER FOR GOD (v.10b)

"[Elijah] *called to* [the widow] *and asked her*". This is similar to being a 'Speaker for God', but with a different emphasis.

As a 'Speaker for God', we can quite genuinely wait until someone speaks to us, i.e. we "*speak when we are spoken too*". In other words, we speak about God when someone else raises the topic. We respond and react to others.

By contrast, an Engager *initiates* the conversation. In v.10, the widow is going about her business gathering sticks, and Elijah starts the conversation. The way that God was able to impact the life of the widow, required Elijah to step out –

- -to go beyond *nationality biases* (she was Sidonian),
- -to overcome *social barriers* (she was a woman), and
- -to look past *financial obstacles* (she was a poor widow).

Initiating a conversation requires extreme care and sensitivity. Nevertheless, a key quality for being used by God is to be ready to initiate and to be an Engager for God.

6. Being "Used by God" means being an
ENCOURAGER THROUGH GOD (v.13a)

Elijah gives the widow the simplest of words of encouragement: "*Don't be afraid*". Even though there was a drought in the land, food was scarce, and the woman was facing death head-on, Elijah encourages her not to be afraid.

A key quality for being used by God is to be an encourager.

7. Being “Used by God” means being a
RECEIVER FROM GOD (v.15b)

“*there was food every day*”. Elijah, the woman and her family all received from God every day.

Some people are embarrassed when God provides for them through the obedience and generosity of someone else. The phrase “thank you” sounds totally inadequate, but that’s all that needs to be said and heard.

God loves each one of us so much that He provides for us, often in ways we don’t understand. To be used by God, we need to be open and ‘thankful-receivers’ from God.

Today is a Gift from God, that’s why it’s called the Present!

8. Being “Used by God” means being a
PRAY-ER TO GOD (v.20a)

“[Elijah] *cried out to the Lord*”. This may be an unfamiliar phrase, but it just means: *deliberately and wholeheartedly praying to God*.

In the New Testament, Jesus taught us a model prayer we call the “Lord’s Prayer”. Jesus’ teaching on prayer can be reduced down to 3 key principles:

- keep it honest
- keep it simple
- keep it up!

A key quality for being used by God is to be a Pray-er. Praying honestly, praying simply, and praying constantly.

9. Being “Used by God” means being a
HEALER BY GOD (v.22)

“*the boy’s life returned to him*”. God used Elijah to bring the boy back to life.

So much is said and written these days about miraculous healings; whether they still happen today, and, if they do, why are some people healed and some are not. It doesn’t take long before you encounter some extreme views on healing.

Unfortunately, this is too big a topic to look at today, but I will make one comment:

We worship a God who created the heavens and the earth, and who designed and created the intricacies of the human body. In the New Testament, Jesus, God’s own Son, raised 3 people from the dead: the son of the widow of Nain, Jairus’ daughter and Lazarus. If nothing else, these credentials emphasise God’s power and majesty over the whole of creation – so why not healing?

A key quality for being used by God is to have faith that God has the power to *heal* and to *save*.

10. Being “Used by God” means being an
AMBASSADOR FOR GOD (v.24)

“*Now I know*”. From what Elijah had said and done, the woman was convinced of the truth and validity of the God that Elijah worshipped.

Consider the following list of 11 qualities of an ambassador. Note how they mirror what it means to be a Christian in God’s Kingdom; to be an ambassador for God:

- i. Appointed by the king, not voted into position.
- ii. Appointed to represent the kingdom.
- iii. Committed only to the kingdom’s interests.
- iv. A visual representation of the kingdom.
- v. Totally covered by the kingdom.
- vi. Totally protected by his government.
- vii. They never become a citizen of the country where they are assigned.
- viii. They can only be recalled by the king.
- ix. Has access to all the nation's wealth for the assignment.
- x. Speaks his nation's official position on an issue.
- xi. His objective is to influence the country where he is assigned for his kingdom.

Jesus is the Chief Ambassador. As Christians and followers of Jesus Christ, He is the role model that we are called to immitate.

A key quality for being used by God is to be a worthy ambassador for God.

CONCLUSION

Elijah was a significant prophet that God used powerfully. From this list of Elijah’s qualities, we can see why God was able to use Elijah so many times.

Note that each of these qualities have a common feature – they all are *visible*. In other words, being “used by God” is a visible activity. There is evidence when you are being used by God.

As we apply this list to our Christian lives, don’t be overwhelmed by how many items are on the list, or feel guilty if there are areas that you may not be expressing at the moment. Instead, ask God to highlight the one item where He wants us to focus on – and then really go for it.

Let us be ready, willing and open to be used by God – and may that use be visible for all to see.

Elijah was used by God. We too can be used by God.

Amen