

If you've been with us since the first of the year, you know we spent it talking about some of the Big Events in the Old Testament, some of those amazing miracle stories of God intervening in the story of Israel. And we saw over and over that those spectacles pointed us not to the miracles, but to the everyday relationship God desires with us.

But we saw something during that series that is probably hard for us to admit to ourselves: following God daily is hard. Really hard. God's demands on our lives are radically counter-cultural, and the ways of God don't come naturally to us.

So faith can be exhausting. That's why so many of us prefer a weekly faith to a daily faith. The effort and intention it takes for us to cultivate the various spiritual practices we know will guide us to the life God wants for us are daunting, intimidating.

In practical terms: learning to read the bible is harder than not reading the bible. Learning to have a meaningful prayer life is harder than not praying. Learning the discipline of generous finances is harder than just not giving, or giving occasionally. And so on and so on.

So I want to look with you today at a big part of the reason we struggle so much with implementing these practices in our lives, a major roadblock to our spiritual journeys:

The problem is that we try to live our faith journeys on our own.

So that's what I want to talk about with you today: what it looks like to follow Jesus *with* other people. In fact, for the next four weeks, we're going to be in a series we're calling **The Mentorist**. We're going to take the modern concept of mentoring and explore some of the obvious mentoring relationships we find in the Scriptures.

What I want to show you this morning is that you were never meant to follow Jesus on your own, and that you are closer to the community of people you were meant to journey with than you realize.

I totally understand why we think faith is something we do on our own. Not only is our whole culture obsessed with individualism and not needing anyone else to succeed, but even in the Church that's how we talk about our relationship with God. We tell people to have a personal faith life, filled with "quiet times" and private spiritual practices.

And of course we all have to practice these practices. Even though you play basketball on a team, you still have to play.

My point is that, unlike say golf or running - individual sports that are just as enjoyable alone as they are with others, following Jesus is more like basketball or baseball. It's a team sport. There's plenty you do on your own, and we all have our positions we play, but the fullest expression of our faith isn't found alone. It's with the team. **[we can picture this some way]**

The Bible tells us this over and over again: we weren't meant to follow God alone. Christianity was never designed to be a solo sport. We find true success in our spiritual lives when we walk with other people.

Take a look at 1 Kings 19 with me - turn there in your Bibles. If you grabbed a bible off the rack on the way in, or out of the pew in front of you, you can find 1 Kings 19 on page 277. And if you don't own a bible, we would be honored if you'd take that Bible as a gift from us.

As you're turning to 1 Kings 19, let me give you a little background. We're going to look at the events that immediately follow the story we explored last week, of Elijah's showdown with the prophets of Ba'al at Mt. Carmel.

You'll remember that Israel was being ruled at this time by a king named Ahab, and his foreign wife, Jezebel. Ahab and Jezebel had introduced worship of the Canaanite god Ba'al into Israel, and the people of Israel were abandoning worshipping Yahweh, Israel's god to follow the lead of their king.

This all came to a head when Elijah called for a showdown at Mt. Carmel between him and the 850 pagan prophets - really a showdown between Yahweh and Ba'al for who is the true god. Elijah won the contest when Yahweh rained fire down from the skies onto the altar Elijah had built, proving that Yahweh, not Ba'al is the true god. The Israelites then slaughtered the 850 false prophets and Yahweh sent rain to end a three-year drought.

Wow. What an amazing, dramatic story. A powerful demonstration of God's faithfulness and authority. And Elijah was right in the middle of it.

So you'd think Elijah would be on a crazy high. He basically just won the Super Bowl of God Battles. In other words, Yahweh won the God Bowl by defeated Ba'al only a little bit more thoroughly than Seattle shut down Denver last week. [[bring back God Bowl graphic](#)]

But let's look at what happens next, beginning in the first verse of 1 Kings 19:

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them."

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died."

Instead of being overthrown, Ahab and Jezebel are more furious than ever. Jezebel swears an oath to destroy Elijah, so he's forced to go into hiding - fleeing to Judah would be like someone fleeing to Canada to hide today. So Elijah's hiding, afraid for his life, and he actually prays to die.

Instead of granting his prayer, God leads him to a cave in the desert. In verse 10:

...The Lord said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

God asks Elijah what's wrong, and Elijah puts into words something we can all relate to: He says, I've done everything you asked me to do, and I'm all alone. It didn't work out the way I thought it would and now I'm scared, abandoned and alone.

Granted, Elijah's story is just a bit more dramatic than ours, but you've been there, haven't you? I know I have.

In response to Elijah's lament, God sends a massive earthquake, a tornado and a firestorm. Three huge, flashy events like we looked at in the last series. But God's not in those big spectacular things. Instead, God comes to Elijah in the silence, in a whisper. In v14:

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
He replied again, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

Even after the big spectacles, the firestorm and the tornado and the earthquake, Elijah says the same exact thing: I'm sacred, abandoned and alone. I'm the only one left.

It's worth pausing here for a moment to note that the Big Events aren't the solution for Elijah. He won the God Bowl and witnessed supernatural firenadoes and none of the spectacle can cure his despair. No amount of Big Event spirituality can comfort him.

This is counterintuitive. We believe that when we're feeling exhausted or defeated what we need most is a dramatic change, a big movement of God in our lives. But apparently that's not true. Because if it would've worked for anyone, it would've worked for Elijah.

So what do we need? Let's read on:

Then the Lord told him, "Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha! Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!" -- 1 Kings 19:1-18

God assures Elijah that he's not, in fact, alone. There are at least 7,000 others in Israel who remain faithful to Yahweh like Elijah. And moreover, God promises Elijah an assistant, a man named Elisha.

What we need when we're exhausted, when we can't see a way to keep moving forward in our relationship with God, is not a flash miracle, but another person. When we feel like we're all alone, we need to know that we're not in fact alone. That there are others on this journey with us. Others who are doing their best to follow God. Others who are falling and getting back up and trying again and finding some victories just like we are.

Look at what Elijah does next:

So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field. There were twelve teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and then walked away. Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, "First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!"

Elijah replied, "Go on back, but think about what I have done to you."

So Elisha returned to his oxen and slaughtered them. He used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant. -- 1 Kings 19:-21

Elijah listens to God, finds Elisha and invites him to be a part of Elijah's journey. This is what Mentoring really is: finding those people on the same journey we are and choosing to live intentionally with them. [I imagine the map zoomed out to show others around us on the same journey]

Some of you are thinking, Okay, sounds great. But where would I even start to look for those other people?

As we'll see in this series, there are three orientations our mentoring relationships should take: Before, Beside and Behind us. [map here, highlighting each in turn.]

We should look ahead of us, to those who've walked this path **Before** us. Those who have more knowledge and experience, more wisdom, who can help us avoid some of the potholes and pitfalls, give us tips on how to get better, advice they've won from years of experience.

We should look **Beside** us, to those who're in roughly the same place we are. We can work together with them, helping each other, carrying each others burdens and celebrating our common victories.

And we should be looking back to those who come **Behind** us. Those who aren't as far along in the journey as we are. We should be considering what we have to offer them, how we can help them to succeed.

Before, Beside, Behind. These are the relationships God calls us into. The relationships that will make our lives full and rich. The relationships that hold us up when we feel exhausted.

Speaking of exhaustion, some of you are already cringing inwardly because I just gave you one more thing to do. Or maybe three more things to do. Either way, the problem was that you already had too much to do - hence the exhaustion.

You're thinking to yourself, Okay JR., that all sounds nice, but I'm just not going to do it. I don't have the time, the margin, to add one new relationship to my life, never mind three.

The good news for you is that you probably don't actually need to begin too many new relationships. Most of us already have people in our lives who would be perfect mentoring partners. People who are Before, Beside and Behind us already. People we already see on a daily or weekly basis. People we do lunch with, or get together with on weekends.

For the vast majority of us, leaning into mentoring relationships isn't going to be about finding new friends. It'll be about mobilizing the relationships we already have, about moving those relationships intentionally toward mentoring.

This is also why we believe Small Groups are so important here at BCN. Small Groups are *not* these mentoring relationships, but they are a great place to find those relationships. Several of the guys in my small group have become people I share my life with outside of Small Group.

Of course, that's not the *only* place to find these relationships. It's just a convenient one. You may work with someone. Or have a social connection of some kind.

Over the next month, we're going to explore each of the mentoring orientations: Before, Beside and Behind. We're going to look at the key features of those various relationships and find some practical strategies for moving the friendships we have into intentional, life-giving mentoring friendships.

My assignment for you over the next week is to begin to pay attention, and pray. Ask God to show you who in your life you should be in these mentoring relationships with. Look at those who've gone before you. Look beside you. And look behind you.

As you pray, listen. God led Elijah to Elisha, and God will show you who those people in your life are. So pay attention this week. Write down some names that stick out to you.

The good news is that you were never meant to follow Jesus alone. And God has placed people in your life who are going to be life-giving, powerful companions on your spiritual journey (and you on theirs).

I hope you're ready to learn who they are. Because it's time to begin.

Communion SetUp

We're closing our time together today by receiving communion. This ritual reminds us that Jesus gave us his body and blood, offered up his own life for us so that we could be reconnected with God. And it's a meal that we take together because by choosing to follow Jesus, we all become part of his body. We're all welcomed into one Church. We all begin to walk on the same journey together.

You don't have to be a member of Beaver Creek Nazarene to receive Communion. This is Jesus' table, and he has invited everyone. So if you're a person who's tired of walking alone, who feels like Elijah in that cave, and you're ready to find those other people around you and to walk into God's life with them, then you're invited to receive Jesus' meal.

I'm going to pray over this meal, and then you're invited to come. Take one of the wafers (they're gluten free, for those with that intolerance). The wafers represent Jesus' body, which was broken for our sin. Dip the wafer in the cup of grape juice. The juice represents Jesus' blood, which was poured out. Jesus' death reconnects us with God and with each other.

Jesus' death makes these life-giving relationships possible. So we come to his table today as a commitment to walk together.