

How to Survive
June 20, 2010
Steven M Conger

1 Kings 19:1-15

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." ³Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. ⁴But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." ⁶He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." ⁸He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

⁹At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." ¹¹He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking 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 a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." ¹⁵Then the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram.

This past week, at the monthly Steering Committee meeting of LARRI, we decided to finish our recovery work by September 30, 2011.

When you think about it, that is kind of a funny statement.

Here it is, June 20th, 2010 – almost two years since the historic September 14th floods, and we are talking about how we will finish up in another 15 months.

We still have over 600 jobs to complete, and we have been averaging about 25 completions a month.

Now my math is not very good – but 25 time 15 equals only 375 – that leaves 225 homes that will not be finished.

The reality is – we have to increase our productivity to 40 houses each month if we want to achieve our goal.

The problem is – we will run out of money before we get there.

LARRI has received a grant of close to 14 million dollars thus far from the Lilly Endowment – we are seeking another 2 – 4 million plus a lot more volunteers if we are going to get the job done.

And we will get the job done.

Fortunately, most of us have never been caught in a disaster.

And I hope and pray that you never are!

BUT, the chances are that at some point in your life you will be involved in some type of event that will seem cataclysmic to you.

It may be a personal crisis

Or it may be a natural disaster like a flood – or who knows what else.

We're used to hearing about disasters – seems like one happens every other day.

Some are more disastrous than others,
But we don't expect that they'll ever happen to us.

Author Nassim Nicholas Taleb calls these unusual, who'd-a-think-it kinds of disasters "black swans."

He defines them as “low-probability, high-impact events” that hardly anyone would have anticipated.

The flood of 2008 certainly was one.

As was the financial meltdown, but other scenarios are more apocalyptic.

What do you do if you are caught in the midst of a black swan?

Say you’re traveling in a Third World country and get caught in the crossfire of a coup attempt or you’re hiking in the back country and are suddenly surrounded by walls of flame from a lightning-struck wildfire.

Believe it or not, because events like this seem more and more common *National Geographic Adventure* magazine has put up on their Web site tips, to help us out, on how to survive almost anything.

If you’re suddenly confronted with whizzing bullets and masked gunmen in a foreign country, the best thing to do, they tell us, is make your way to the airport or the embassy.

If you get captured and held for ransom, security experts say to try to relax and go along because 95 percent of international kidnappings are resolved with a payoff.

Are you watching the water on the beach recede unusually fast? Run for high ground or the tallest building you can find before the impending tsunami wave hits or, if you get caught in the water, ride it out by keeping your feet up and in front of you as if you had just fallen out of a whitewater raft.

Power grid crashes? Make sure you have a good survival kit before the fact.

Caught in a wildfire? Ditch your synthetic pack and clothes, which will melt under the heat, and head for the nearest body of water or a clearing while covering your nose and mouth with a wet cotton cloth or even some dirt.

Granted, you aren’t likely to be running from terrorists or tsunamis.

On the other hand:

- You might suddenly face the loss of a job.

- You might suddenly discover that your marriage is in trouble.
- You might suddenly face the loss of your health.
- You might suddenly lose a loved one.

And if they happen to you – they certainly are high impact!

If you take the time and go to the *National Geographic Adventure* magazine website what you are going to find is that a lot of the advice for surviving a low-probability, high-impact event is just common sense;

For example,

If your GPS stops working, go old school and use a map (duh).

The problem is, unfortunately, that common sense is often one of the first things we lose in an instant emergency.

When we're confronted with a survival scenario, it's most often the ability to calm down and work the problem step by step that means the difference between life and death.

Thinking positive can be a lifesaver, while negative thoughts of hopelessness can be a killer.

Our text this morning is a perfect case in point.

Elijah could have used this advice big time

If you have never read the story of Elijah kicking the butts of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, it is a classic (found in chapter 18 of 1 Kings).

Well, after Elijah humiliates the prophets of Baal, a messenger comes to him with a message from the evil queen and Baal worshiper Jezebel, who plans to have Elijah killed within 24 hours.

Almost overnight, Elijah goes from being triumphant to being a target.

Instead of confronting the queen with the help of God, Elijah panics and flees for his life out into the desert, where fear and despair bring him to the point of wanting to die.

³Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. ⁴But he himself

went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

Elijah can teach us a lot about our own spiritual survival, especially when we evaluate it in light of several important survival skills that have more to do with character, wits and worldview than with the right equipment or the ability to determine the right kinds of bugs and tree bark to munch on.

When we're hit with a crisis, we need to remember some things that will help us as God says in verse 15 "return on your way".

If we want survive a crisis the first thing we must do is:

Do the next right thing

John Leach, a psychology professor at Lancaster University writes:

"Debriefings of survivors show repeatedly that they possess the capacity to break down the event they are faced with into small, manageable tasks. Each step, each chunk must be as simple as possible. ... Simple, directed action is the key to regaining normal psychological functioning."

Rather than fast-forwarding our thoughts out to all the potential negative outcomes, we need to be able to break the problem down into manageable parts.

Elijah panics and runs when Jezebel's messenger confronts him.

But think about this:

If Jezebel were really serious about knocking off Elijah within 24 hours, why didn't she just send a hit man to rub him out or some cops to arrest him?

Maybe she feared that the God who torched the altar on Mount Carmel would smoke her, too, if she killed Elijah outright, so she just wanted to scare him off.

Elijah immediately imagines the worst-case scenario in his own mind and bolts instead of asking the right questions of himself and, perhaps more importantly, of God.

Had Elijah thought it through, he may have realized that his situation wasn't as dire as it first appeared.

Confronted with an instant crisis, we need to be able to break the problem down into its component parts.

You're confronted with a life-threatening illness:
 What's the first thing you need to do today?
 What information is helpful right now?

You've just received a pink slip:
 Where do you need to go first?
 Who do you call?

Thinking of doing the next right thing enables us to move forward by degrees and think clearly instead of becoming overwhelmed by panic.

A second helpful skill is to **develop and use a mantra that you can live by before you need it.**

Steve Callahan, adrift in a raft for 76 days, just kept repeating the word *survival*.

Over and over during the ordeal, he'd say things such as "Concentrate on now, on survival."

Yossi Ghinsberg, a hiker who was lost in the Bolivian jungle for three weeks, repeatedly used the phrase *man of action* to motivate himself.

A positive message can keep your spirits up and your mind focused on doing the next right thing.

By contrast, a negative perspective can lead you down the road of despair and death.

Notice that Elijah's mantra is focused on death.

"It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life for I am no better than my ancestors" (v. 4).

When confronted twice by God while hiding in a cave on Mount Horeb, Elijah offers the same response each time:

“I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away (vv. 10, 14).

The prophet is burned out, bummed out and wants out.

What kind of self-talk emerges naturally from you?

What kind of positive mantra can you begin to develop now that will help you in the midst of crisis?

Another important skill in the midst of a crisis?

Surrender, but don't give up.

While it may sound like a paradox, the concept of surrender is at the heart of survival.

Fear, especially fear of death, can be a paralyzing force that can keep you from doing what's necessary to survive.

Iraqi journalist Ahmed Abdullah has learned about the concept of surrender in the midst of years of combat experience.

“If you are afraid, then you have to lock yourself inside your house,” he says. “But if you want to keep on living, then you must forget about your fears and deal with death as something that is a must, something that's going to happen anyway. Even if you don't die this way, you can die normally, naturally. ... Whatever [you] do, [you're] not going to change this.”

Once you come to terms with the possible outcomes, even the ultimate outcome of death, you are more able to keep moving toward survival.

Take the lessons that we learned from our One Month to Live series.

Good survivors realize that they may die, but they're going to keep going anyway.

Think of it like that line from *Braveheart*: “Every man dies; not every man really lives.”

Elijah ran into the desert and wanted to give up — just sit under the broom tree and die.

We might look at him sitting there and recognize some of the classic signs of depression and burnout.

God won't let him quit, however.

An angel feeds him there in the wilderness (vv. 5, 7), and he gets some time to rest and even a cave to hide in.

God meets him there and challenges him to push through his fear and continue on with the business of being God's prophet, dangerous as that profession may be.

The lesson here is that even when we're ready to give up, God is still with us, feeding us, prompting us, challenging us. It's only when we surrender to God's call that we can begin to move past our fear and despair and get at the business of living boldly into the future.

One way we're able to get past our fear is by helping others, which is another essential survival skill.

Studies have shown that people in the Nazi death camps who focused their energy on helping people around them were much more likely to survive than those who allowed themselves to simply be victims.

It's why doctors and nurses have a much higher survival rate in a disaster than the average population — they are responsible for others.

Notice how God lifts Elijah out of his self-indulgent victimhood by commanding him to go and anoint several new kings and, perhaps most importantly, to train his replacement, Elisha (vv. 15-17).

It's the difference between moping and having a mission. If you're feeling like a victim or you can't work out your own problem, one of the best solutions to getting unstuck is to pour your energy into helping someone else.