

SERVE WITH LOYALTY

Leader pages on pp. 148-151

THE POINT:
GOD DESERVES
OUR LOYALTY AND
SERVICE.

1 KINGS 18:20-26,31-39

²⁰ So Ahab summoned all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. ²¹ Then Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him." But the people didn't answer him a word.

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²² Then Elijah said to the people, "I am the only remaining prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. ²³ Let two bulls be given to us. They are to choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood but not light the fire. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The God who answers with fire, he is God." All the people answered, "That's fine." ²⁵ Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Since you are so numerous, choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first. Then call on the name of your god but don't light the fire." ²⁶ So they took the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "Baal, answer us!" But there was no sound; no one answered. Then they danced around the altar they had made.

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³¹ Elijah took twelve stones—according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Israel will be your name"—³² and he built an altar with the stones in the name of the Lord. Then he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold about four gallons. ³³ Next, he arranged the wood, cut up the bull, and placed it on the wood. He said, "Fill four water pots with water and pour it on the offering to be burned and on the wood." ³⁴ Then he said, "A second time!" and they did it a second time. And then he said, "A third time!" and they did it a third time. ³⁵ So the water ran all around the altar; he even filled the trench with water. ³⁶ At the time for offering the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah approached the altar and said, "Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, and that at your word I have done all these things. ³⁷ Answer me, Lord! Answer me so that this people will know that you, the Lord, are God and that you have turned their hearts back." ³⁸ Then the Lord's fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ **When all the people saw it, they fell facedown and said, "The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!"**

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MEMORY VERSE

HOW CAN WE DEMONSTRATE LOYALTY TO GOD?

Semper Fidelis, Latin for “Always Faithful,” has been the U.S. Marine Corps motto since 1883. It expresses the Marines’ pledge to remain faithful always, no matter what.

Marine Corporal Matthew Bradford (Ret.) exemplifies this motto. Serving in Iraq in January 2007, Bradford was on patrol when he stepped on an improvised explosive device (IED). Shrapnel blew into Bradford’s eyes, took off one leg, severely mangled the other, damaged his left arm and right hand, and caused serious internal injuries. Three weeks later, he woke up to discover he was blind and had lost both legs. Yet incredibly, in April 2010, Bradford reenlisted in the Marine Corps, becoming the first blind, double amputee to do so. Semper Fidelis.²⁵

Marines engaged in battle understand the importance of unwavering loyalty. The prophet Elijah has shown us what unwavering loyalty to God looks like. In 1 Kings 18, we find Elijah involved in a battle. His loyalty to God was clear, and he challenged others to do the same. His challenge confronts us still today.

Don’t Waver in Loyalty to God // 1 Kings 18:20-21

Even after three and a half years of drought, Ahab, Jezebel, and the people of Israel still worshiped Baal. Ignoring the evidence of God’s supremacy, they remained stubborn in their love for Baal. But God continued to speak through miraculous signs, and the prophet Elijah continued to proclaim God’s power.

When God decided it was time, He informed Elijah the rain would return. He directed His prophet to give Ahab the news (18:1-2). Ahab was angry. He blamed Elijah for the drought. Ahab accused him of being “the one ruining Israel.” Elijah countered that it was Ahab and Ahab’s family that destroyed Israel by abandoning God and worshiping false gods. Elijah proposed a contest to prove God’s sovereignty (vv. 17-19).

Elijah invited Ahab to meet him on Mount Carmel and bring “all Israel” along with the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah



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(v. 19). Mount Carmel was between Israel and Phoenicia. Because the Canaanites thought of Mount Carmel as the dwelling place of their gods, it was the ideal place to show just how powerless their false gods were.

At Mount Carmel, Elijah stood alone for God. The 450 prophets of Baal aligned with the king and queen alongside an additional 400 prophets for Asherah. Israel flirted with the worship of both idols—gods of fertility—throughout much of its history (Num. 25:1-3; Judg. 2:11-13). Ultimately, this fascination with false gods would be the nation’s downfall (2 Kings 17:6-20).

God seeks our love, but He won’t tolerate our divided loyalty. Loving God means loving Him first and foremost, above all other commitments. Loyalty to Him means surrendering any devotion to lesser gods. Elijah set this choice before God’s people in verse 21. They had been wavering in their loyalty. Israel hadn’t renounced their faith in God, but they hadn’t let go of their idols. Elijah insisted you cannot have it both ways.

HOW MIGHT ELIJAH’S WORD CHALLENGE THE 21ST CENTURY CHURCH?

God had clearly spoken. The first commandment is: “Do not have other gods besides me” (Ex. 20:3). Jesus upheld this command during His wilderness temptation, “It is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Luke 4:8).

In Deuteronomy 30, Moses called the Israelites to renew their covenant with God. He offered a choice—between faithfulness to God or unfaithfulness. The first would result in blessing, the latter in destruction. God challenged us directly, “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, love the Lord your God, obey him, and remain faithful to him” (Deut. 30:19-20).

WHAT DOES AN UNWAVERING LOYALTY TO GOD LOOK LIKE?

Don’t Worship Other Gods //

1 Kings 18:22-26

Elijah proposed a contest to prove who was the One, true God. It would’ve been a bold challenge if the contest was between Elijah and just one prophet of Baal. But the 450



DIGGING DEEPER LOYAL SERVANT

People gathered to witness the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. And Elijah had a question for them, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions?” (1 Kings 18:21). The word translated as “hesitate” (*pasach*) means “to limp” or “to dance.” The word refers to the spiritual indecision that existed in the minds of the people. The people of Israel hesitated or wavered between God and Baal worship. Many enjoyed the sinful pleasures and benefits that they took part in while following Ahab and his idolatrous worship. It’s important to take a stand for God. You can’t claim to know God and your actions don’t align with that knowledge. Titus 1:16 says, “They claim to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.”

What can we do to make sure that we never worship anyone or anything except God?

prophets against him made Elijah's challenge even more bold.

Elijah wasn't the only person still loyal to God (vv. 12-13), but he was the only one who showed up that day. He was the only one publicly denouncing false gods. Loyalty to God is often unpopular, but it is always the right position. That soon would be evident to all who gathered on Mount Carmel.

Elijah made it his mission to expose the lie that Baal was a real god like Yahweh. He proposed that each side would prepare a bull for sacrifice and place it on an altar. Baal's prophets would call on their god, and Elijah would call on the Lord. Whichever deity responded with fire to burn the sacrifice would be proven to be the true God. Baal was called the storm god, who could summon lightning at his command, while followers of God maintained He held power over nature (Ps. 29).

Confident in their idol, the prophets of Baal entered the contest. For hours they called on Baal to send fire. They tried dancing to tempt him to take notice of their cries. In the end, a lie is still a lie. The myth that Baal was a powerful deity worthy of worship had been destroyed.

WHY ARE WE SO PRONE TO MAKE IDOLS IN OUR LIVES?

We don't typically worship idols of wood and stone, but we still have our false gods. Pastor and author Timothy Keller wrote, "What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that holds your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give."²⁶ Family and career can become idols. So can achievement, power, money, and possessions.

No idol can compete with God. "For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is

not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world with its lust is passing away" (1 John 2:16-17).

Remember God Is the One True God // 1 Kings 18:31-39

When it was Elijah's turn, he had no tricks. No dancing or crying out for hours. Elijah let God show Himself and gave absolute proof that the fire was from God. Inviting the people close, the prophet rebuilt a broken altar to God. In its deteriorated state, the altar represented the people's broken commitment to God.

Elijah used twelve stones to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, God's people before their division into two kingdoms. Then, to remove any possibility of trickery on his part, Elijah dug a trench around the altar and ordered that the altar be completely soaked in water. When water ran around the altar and even filled the trench, it was easy to see only an act of God could cause the sacrifice to burn.



The prophet called on God in prayer. He didn't ask God to send fire or tell God how to do His job. Instead, he asked three things:

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- Prove you are God in Israel.
- Confirm I am your prophet.
- Turn back the hearts of your people.

Elijah was relying on the only One in the universe who is 100 percent reliable. Elijah had learned to be loyal and faithful to God because God had always been faithful to him. God assures us, “I will never leave you or abandon you” (Heb. 13:5). Yes, God has earned our undivided loyalty. Nothing and no one else we depend on is that reliable.

HOW HAS GOD SHOWN YOU THAT HE IS THE ONE TRUE GOD?

When God sent fire from the skies to burn up the sacrifice Elijah had laid on the altar, He proved that He is the only true God. The fire consumed the wood, the stone, the sacrifice, the soil, and even the water. This overwhelming evidence convinced the people. They acknowledged Yahweh as the One, true God. After the victory, God sent the rain just as He had promised (1 Kings 18:45), proving He is always faithful.

DID YOU KNOW?

For over 300 years, the black church in America has provided a place of safety for black Christians in a nation plagued by a history of slavery, racial injustice, and racial disparities. In today's culture of uncertainty and divisiveness, all Christians need to learn from African-American believers, who placed church life and their loyalty to God at the center of their community. We need to remember that the church was God's idea (Matt. 16:18), and is His plan for today. Where else can believers go to receive strength to face the turbulency around us? Church is the only place where hope and strength to endure can be refreshed. African-American believers knew and practiced this throughout an abusive cultural history. All Christians need to do the same by embracing the church and renewing their loyalty to God.

In what ways has the black church in America helped promote loyalty to God despite the experiences of life?

LIVE IT

How can you eliminate idols and distractions and show God the loyalty He deserves?

Recently, as part of the outcry against racial injustice people have stopped standing for the Pledge of Allegiance. Those who don't stand are protesting the fact that there is not “liberty and justice for all.” If you proclaim loyalty to something or someone your actions should line up with what you proclaim. Believers have a responsibility to be loyal to God and our actions must reflect our loyalty to Him.

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- **Choose generosity.** Read Matthew 6:24. Is love of money threatening your loyalty to God? Obedience through generosity can help you break the claim that money is trying to make on your life.
- **Choose truth.** Study further to defend your belief in God as the only true God. Books like “Mere Christianity,” by C.S. Lewis or “The Reason for God,” by Timothy Keller are great resources to study.
- **Choose to take a stand.** If there is a dividing issue in your church or community, determine to stand for God. This means standing on solid biblical teaching even when it's not popular to do so.

DAILY READINGS

1. FAITHFUL LIVING // ROMANS 1:16

Paul acknowledged his faith in God. He was not ashamed of serving God. He boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus knowing that it is the power of God to transform and save lives. We must also hold on to these truths. The righteousness of God has been revealed through Christ, and our faith in Him grants us eternal life. As we trust Jesus, we are saved and made righteous by Him. We must also faithfully and boldly proclaim this gospel to others. We must tell the world that God's power saved us and transformed us so we can be more like Him.

Choose to live your life faithfully to God, boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus and its power so that others will be saved.

2. LOYAL SERVICE // 1 KINGS 8:60-61

King Solomon's prayer to God was that people be devoted to God by walking in His laws and following His commands. Our loyalty to God must surpass our loyalty to anything else in our lives. This means we must serve Him faithfully, live righteously, and be obedient to His commands. When we do this, people around us will know that God is the only God in our lives. Our loyal service to God and His Word with its benefits will influence others to live as we live for God. Because of that alone, it makes sense to loyally serve God. If not for ourselves then for our relatives and friends so that they too may reap the benefits of serving God.

Be loyal to God and His commands so others can know He alone is God.

3. HE'S THE ONE // 1 KINGS 18:20-21

Elijah called all the people together and asked them to choose who they would follow, Baal or God. They didn't choose before seeing who would win the competition Elijah had set up. Their hearts were divided. Although they knew God and His power, they didn't want to choose Him and lose the

pleasures of following Baal. People say they follow God but are drawn to worldly pleasures. However, God continues to be proven as the only true God.

Remain faithful to God and resist anything and anyone that tries to be exalted above Him.

4. SERVE IN HOPE // PSALM 37:7-9

It's easy to become angry when you have been faithful to God and His ways, yet you see others who are evil get ahead. At those times we must remember that God honors His Word. This psalm reminds us not to get upset but quietly hope in God. Anger and discouragement will destroy our lives while hope builds up. Instead of getting angry, choose to focus on the goodness of God. Reminiscing on God's goodness will provide the strength you need to continue serving Him. So don't become agitated about those who prosper while doing evil. Just keep your focus, and God will give you what you need to go on.

Hope in God and you will prosper.

5. RESCUE ME // PSALM 34:17-19

We all experience trouble from time to time. Our troubles may be as small as a headache or as big as bankruptcy. Even though when troubles come we may feel discouraged, we, as followers of Christ, know Who to call on. We call on the Lord, and we have the assurance that He hears us. Through His Word, we learn that God has promised to be with us. His presence is the source of our strength and wisdom when we are going through difficult times. He is all we need. Though troubles and even people may come against us, when we call out to our God who is with us, He rescues us from them all. Therefore, we should not allow discouragement to overwhelm us when we face troubles. We only need to remember God is right there by our side. Just call on Him and give thanks for His help.

God will absolutely rescue us from all trouble.