

# Beside the Drying Brook

by F.B. Meyer

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*God's servants must learn to trust in Him absolutely, take one step at a time, and value the hidden life in order to be effective in ministry and service to God.*

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 17:3, 1 Kings 17:9, Psalm 62:5, Song of Solomon 5:1, Matthew 6:33, John 4:13-14, Acts 9:6

**Topics:** "Trust in God", "Faith"

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## Description

F.B. Meyer explores the life of Elijah, emphasizing that he was an ordinary man who achieved extraordinary feats through faith and obedience to God. He highlights the importance of taking one step at a time in faith, learning the value of a hidden life of prayer, and trusting God absolutely, even when faced with challenges like drying brooks. Meyer encourages believers to recognize that God often leads them through periods of waiting and uncertainty to deepen their faith and reliance on Him. Ultimately, he reassures that God's provision is always present for those who remain faithful and receptive to His guidance.

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## Transcript

We are studying the life of a man of like passions with ourselves, one who was weak where we are weak, failing where we would fail. But he stood, single-handed, against his people and stemmed the tide of idolatry and sin and turned a nation back to God. And he did it by the use of resources which are within reach of us all. This is the fascination of the story. If it can be proven that he acted under a spell of some secret which is hidden from us ordinary persons or that he was cast in an heroic mold to which we can lay no claim, then disappointment will overcast our interest and we must lay aside the story. Elijah would be a model we could not copy, an ideal we could not realize, a vision that mocks us as it fades into the azure of the past.

But this is not the case. This man, by whom God threshed the mountains, was only a worm at the best. This pillar in God's temple was, by nature, a reed shaken by the breath of the slightest zephyr. This prophet of fire who shone like a torch, was originally but a piece of smoking flax. Faith made him all he became, and faith will do as much for us if only we can exercise it to appropriate the might of the eternal God as he did. All power is in God, and it has pleased Him to store it all in {16} the risen Savior, as in some vast reservoir. These stores are brought into human hearts by the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost is given according to the measure of our receptivity and faith. Oh, for Elijah's receptiveness, that we might be as full of Divine power as he was, and as able, therefore, to do exploits for God and truth!

But, before this can happen, we must pass through the same education as he. You must go to Cherith and Zarephath before you can stand on Carmel. Even the faith you have must be pruned, educated, and matured so that it may become strong enough to subdue kingdoms, work righteousness, and turn armies of aliens to flight.

Notice, then, the successive steps in God's education of His servants.

1. GOD'S SERVANTS MUST LEARN TO TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME. This is an elementary lesson, but it is hard to learn. No doubt Elijah found it so. Before he left Thisbe for Samaria, to deliver the message that burdened his soul, he would naturally inquire what he should do when he had delivered it. How would he be received? What would be the outcome? Where should he go to escape the vengeance of Jezebel, who had not shrunk from slaying the prophets less dauntless than himself? If he had asked those questions of God and waited for a reply before he left his highland home, he would never have gone at all. Our Father never treats His children so. He only shows us one step at a time, and He bids us take it in faith. If we look up into His face and say: "But if I take this step which is certain to involve me in difficulty, what shall I do next?" the heavens will be mute save with the one repeated message, "Take it and trust Me."

But directly God's servant took the step to which he was led, and delivered the message, then "the word of {17} the Lord came to him, saying: Get thee hence, ...hide thyself by the brook Cherith" (1 Kings 17:3). So it was afterwards; it was only when the brook had dried up, and the stream had dwindled to pools, and the pools to drops, and the drops had died away in the sand -- only then did the word of the Lord come to him, saying, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath" (1 Kings 17:9).

I like that phrase, "the word of the Lord came to him." He did not need to go to search for it; it came to him. And so it will come to you. It may come through the Word of God, or through a distinct impression made on your heart by the Holy Ghost, or through circumstances; but it will find you out, and tell you what you are to do. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6).

It may be that for long you have had upon your mind some strong impression of duty; but you have held back, because you could not see what the next step would be. Hesitate no longer. Step out upon what seems to be the impalpable mist, and you will find a slab of adamant beneath your feet. Every time you put your foot forward, you will find that God has prepared a stepping- stone, and another, and another; each appearing as you come to it. The bread is by the day. The manna is every morning. The strength is according to the moment's need. God does not give all the directions at once, lest we should get confused. He tells us just as much as we can remember and do. Then we must look to Him for more. So we learn, by easy stages, the sublime habits of obedience and trust.

2. GOD'S SERVANTS MUST BE TAUGHT THE VALUE OF THE HIDDEN LIFE. "Get thee hence and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith" (1 Kings 17:3). The {18} man who is to take a high place before his fellows must take a low place before his God, and there is no better manner of bringing a man down than by suddenly dropping him out of a sphere to which he was beginning to think himself essential, teaching him that he is not at all necessary to God's plan, and compelling him to consider in the sequestered vale of some Cherith how miked are his motives, and how insignificant his strength.

So the Master dealt with His apostles. When, on one occasion, they returned to Him, full of themselves and flushed with success, He quietly said, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place." We are too

strong, too full of self, for God to use us. We vainly imagine that we are something, and that God cannot dispense with us. How urgently we need that God should bury our self-centeredness in the darkness of a Cherith or a tomb, so as to hide it, and keep it in the place of death. We must not be surprised, then, if sometimes our Father says: "There, child, you have had enough of this hurry, and publicity, and excitement; go and hide yourself by the brook -- hide yourself in the Cherith of the sick chamber, or in the Cherith of bereavement, or in some solitude from which the crowds have ebbed away." Happy is he who can reply, "This Your will is also mine; I flee to You to hide me. Hide me in the secret of Your tabernacle, and beneath the cover of Your wings!"

Every saintly soul that would wield great power with men must win it in some hidden Cherith. A Carmel triumph always presupposes a Cherith; and a Cherith always leads to a Carmel. We cannot give out unless we have previously taken in. We cannot exorcise the devils unless we have first entered into our closets and shut our doors and spent hours of rapt intercourse with God. The acquisition of spiritual power is impossible, unless we {19} hide ourselves from men and from ourselves in some deep gorge where we may absorb the power of the eternal God; as vegetation through long ages absorbed these qualities of sunshine which it gives back through burning coal.

Bishop Andrewes had his Cherith in which he spent five hours every day in prayer and devotion. John Welsh, who thought the day ill-spent which did not witness eight or ten hours of closet communion, had it. David Brainard had it in the woods of North America, which were the favorite scene of his devotions. Christmas Evans had it in his long and lonely journeys amid the hills of Wales. Fletcher of Madeley, who would often leave his classroom for his private chamber and spend hours upon his knees with his students, pleading for the fullness of the Spirit till they could kneel no longer, had his Cherith. Or, passing back to the blessed age from which we date the centuries, Patmos, the seclusion of the Roman prisons, the Arabian desert, and the hills and vales of Palestine, are forever memorable as the Cheriths of those who have made our modern world. Our Lord found His Cherith at Nazareth, in the wilderness of Judea, amid the olives of Bethany, and in the solitudes of Gadara. Not one of us can dispense with some Cherith where the sounds of earthly toil and human voices are exchanged for the murmur of the waters of quietness which are fed from the throne and where we may taste the sweets and imbibe the power of a life hidden in Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost. Sometimes a human spirit, intent on its quest, may even find its Cherith in a crowd. For such an one, God is an all-sufficient abode, and the secret place of the Most High is its most holy place.

3. GOD'S SERVANTS MUST LEARN TO TRUST GOD ABSOLUTELY. {20} At first we yield a timid obedience to a command which seems to involve manifest impossibilities; but when we find that God is even better than His word, our faith grows exceedingly, and we advance to further feats of faith and service. This is how God trains His young eaglets to fly. At last nothing is impossible. This is the key to Elijah's experience.

How strange to be sent to a brook, which would of course be as subject to the drought as any other! How contrary to nature to suppose that ravens, which feed on carrion, would find such food as man could eat; or, having found it, would bring it regularly morning and evening! How unlikely, too, that he could remain secreted from the search of the bloodhounds of Jezebel anywhere within the limits of Israel! But God's command was clear and unmistakable. It left him no alternative but to obey. "So he went and did according to the word of the Lord" (1 Kings 17:5).

One evening, as we may imagine, Elijah reached the narrow gorge, down which the brook bounded with musical babble toward the Jordan. On either side the giant cliffs towered up, inclosing a little patch of blue sky. The interlacing boughs of the trees made a natural canopy in the hottest noon. All along the streamlet's course the moss would make a carpet of richer hue and softer texture than could be found in the palaces of kings. And, yonder, came the ravens -- "the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning... [and] in the evening" (1 Kings 17:6). What a lesson was this of God's power to provide for his child! In after days, Elijah would often recur to it as dating a new epoch in his life. "I can never doubt God again. I am thankful that He shut me off from all other supplies, and threw me back on Himself. I am sure that He will never fail me, whatsoever the circumstances {21} of strait or trial through which He may call me to pass."

There is a strong emphasis on the word THERE -- "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there" (1 Kings 17:4). Elijah might have preferred many hiding places to Cherith; but that was the only place to which the ravens would bring his supplies; and, as long as he was there, God was pledged to provide for him. Our supreme thought should be: "Am I where God wants me to be?" If so, God will work a direct miracle rather than suffer us to perish for lack. If the younger son chooses to go to the far country of his own accord, he may be in danger of dying of starvation among his swine; but if the Father sends him there, he shall have enough and to spare. God sends no soldier to the warfare on his own charges. He does not expect us to attend to the duties of the field and the commissariat. The manna always accompanies the pillar of cloud. If we do His will on earth as in heaven, He will give us daily bread. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

We will not stay to argue the probability of this story being true. It is enough that it is written here. And the presence of the supernatural presents no difficulties to those who can say "Our Father," and who believe in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. But if corroboration were needed, it could be multiplied an hundred-fold from the experience of living people, who have had their needs supplied in ways quite as marvelous as the coming of ravens to the lonely prophet.

A little boy, having read this incident with his widowed mother one wintry night, as they sat in a fireless room beside a bare table, asked her if he might set the door open for God's ravens to come in; he was so sure {22} that they must be on their way. The burgomaster of that German town, passing by, was attracted by the sight of the open door, and entered, inquiring the cause. When he learned the reason, he said, "I will be God's raven," and relieved their need then and afterward. Ah, reader, God has an infinite fertility of resource; and if thou art doing His work where He would have thee, He will supply thy need, though the heavens fall. Only trust Him!

4. GOD'S SERVANTS ARE OFTEN CALLED TO SIT BY DRYING BROOKS. "It came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up" (1 Kings 17:7). Our wildest fancy can but inadequately realize the condition to which the Land of Promise was reduced by the first few months of drought. The mountain pastures were seared as by the passage of fire. The woodlands and copses were scorched and silent. The rivers and brooks shrank attenuated in their beds, receding continually, and becoming daily more shallow and still. There was no rain to revive vegetation or replenish the supplies of water. The sun rose and set for months in the sky, the blue of which was unflecked by a single cloud. There was no dew to sprinkle the parched, cracked earth with refreshing tears. And so Cherith began to sing less cheerily. Each day marked a visible diminution of its stream. Its voice grew fainter and fainter till its bed became a course of stones, baking in the scorching heat. It dried up.

What did Elijah think? Did he think that God had forgotten him? Did he begin to make plans for himself? This would have been human; but we will hope that he waited quietly for God, quieting himself as a weaned child, as he sang, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him" (Psalm 62:5).

Many of us have had to sit by drying brooks. Perhaps some are sitting by them now -- the drying brook of popularity {23} which is ebbing away as from John the Baptist; the drying brook of health, sinking under a creeping paralysis, or a slow consumption; the drying brook of money, slowly dwindling before the demands of sickness, bad debts, or other people's extravagance; the drying brook of friendship, which for long has been diminishing and threatens soon to cease. Ah, it is hard to sit beside a drying brook, much harder than to face the prophets of Baal on Carmel.

Why does God let them dry? He wants to teach us not to trust in His gifts, but in Himself. He wants to drain us of self, as He drained the apostles by ten days of waiting before Pentecost. He wants to loosen our roots before He removes us to some other sphere of service and education. He wants to put in stronger contrast the river of throne-water that never dries. Let us learn these lessons, and turn from our failing Cheriths to our unfailing Savior. All sufficiency resides in Him -- unexhausted by the flight of the ages, undiminished by the thirst of myriads of saints. The river of God is full of water. "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14). "Drink abundantly, O beloved!" (Song 5:1).

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