

# The Running Syndrome

by Jim Cymbala

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in God and waiting for His counsel, and the dangers of running away from one's calling and living for Christ.*

**Duration:** 28:36

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 19:11-12, Psalm 37:7, Ecclesiastes 3:1, Isaiah 40:31, Matthew 11:28-30, Mark 6:31, Acts 3:19

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker encourages ministers and missionaries not to quit or give up, but to come back to the Lord for strength and nourishment. He uses the story of Elijah from the Old Testament as an example of someone who faced spiritual fatigue and wanted to give up after accomplishing great things for God. Elijah, after confronting 400 false prophets and calling down fire from heaven, became suicidal when threatened by a woman. However, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and provided him with food and drink, giving him the strength to continue his journey. The speaker emphasizes the importance of not running on empty and relying on God's presence and word to sustain and empower us in our service to Him.

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## Transcript

I want to continue on my Vital Truth series, and this is a vital, vital, vital, vital truth that is good for all of us, but especially possibly for someone who walks in today who's in the running syndrome. The running syndrome. That's what this message is about.

We're gonna go to the Old Testament and look at a story about one of the greatest prophets in the Bible. His name is Elijah, and Elijah was the one who told wicked King Ahab, the king of the northern kingdom of Israel, that there wouldn't be rain because that's what God was gonna do. A drought came, then he called for the rain to come.

It came, but in between, he faced down 400 false prophets who were serving an idol called Baal, B-A-A-L. Confronted them, called down fire from heaven. I mean, there's nobody in the Old Testament quite like Elijah.

Really appears out of nowhere, nothing's known about his origins, quite a man. But then a strange thing happens. After he has done so many things for God, King Ahab tells his wife, you know, this prophet, he killed all your favorite leaders, were destroyed, these false prophets, and Jezebel, who was a lovely lady,

she sends a threat and says, tell Elijah that I'm gonna put it in New York, okay? I'm gonna kill you.

What happened to those prophets is gonna happen to you. I'm gonna kill you. And Elijah, the mighty man of God, has a very strange reaction.

Read, Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. And when he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, and while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, he came to a broom bush and sat down under it and prayed that he might die. Aren't you happy God doesn't answer all the prayers that we pray sometimes? But he prayed that.

I have had enough, O Lord, he said. Take my life, I'm no better than my ancestors. Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once, an angel touched him and said, get up and eat. He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then laid down again.

The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you. So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled 40 days and 40 nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

There he went into a cave and spent the night. And he replied, I have been very zealous for the Lord, God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant.

The Lord said to him, what are you doing here, Elijah? And he replied, I've been very zealous for the Lord, God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.

The Lord said, go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind.

After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

And when Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Whereupon the Lord told him, I'm not done with you, there's a lot more to do. So go and do this and go and do that.

The running syndrome has its counterpart in physical life, and there's this spiritual truth which is more important. The tendency in all of our lives is that if we run around enough, we will then run down and then we will want to run away. Run around, run down, run away.

You wanna say that with me? Run around, run down. Just like the body, if it's not fed, doesn't get proper rest, we'll break down and get weak. So it is spiritually.

In one of the locker rooms where I was playing basketball in my career after high school and college, there was a sign, I saw it every day when I went in, and it was there so the coach would remind us about how hard you have to work in practice because it said, fatigue makes cowards of us all. Fatigue makes cowards of us all. In other words, when you're playing defense and you're guarding somebody, when you're tired and your legs are giving way, instead of staying in front of your man and playing right, you just

stab at the ball and the guy goes by you and why are you doing it? It's because you're just too tired to guard him the right way.

Takes a lot of energy. Instead of planting your feet properly so you're gonna shoot, you miss your shots because the leg muscles aren't there. You have fatigue, you're tired, your breath is out.

So you're just leaning enough that you can never shoot accurately. Fatigue makes cowards of us all. So all of us have to learn now this truth that it's very dangerous to run around to the point of spiritual fatigue.

This is what happened to this great man. He was doing the work of the Lord. And after facing down 400 prophets, some crazy lady says I'm gonna kill you and now you're gonna go under a tree and you're gonna die? You get suicidal because of something she said? Why would you react that way after all you've done? Very simple.

All of us can run out of gas. You don't have to say amen. I'll say amen for all of you.

We run out of juice because there's nothing that you get from God, no experience you have from God that takes you for months and years, nothing. I wouldn't care if the Lord appeared on this platform today. We would still need him tomorrow to face the battles of the day.

Give us this day our daily bread, our daily strength. And what happens is you can be zealous and working for the Lord, singing in the choir, being an associate pastor, being a deacon, being whatever, traveling, writing books, being an evangelist, whatever it is, being a solid Christian and you're running around doing good, working in BT Kids, being an usher and busy, the home children running here, running there, picking them up from school, this, that, the other and you're running around doing nothing bad and you don't realize that as you're running around and around, you're expending spiritual energy, especially if anything you do just to fight the devil and stand up against him, resist temptation, be strong in the Lord, which can only happen in the power of his might and what happens is you get weak. You run around, you run around and then you start to run down.

What are the signs of running down? You just run out of grace. You run out of God's strengthening power. Paul prays this all the time to churches, to writing to Christians, I pray that God himself might strengthen you in the inner person with power from the Holy Spirit.

Well, if they're Christians, why do they need to be strengthened? Because you need to be strengthened. You need to be strengthened. You need to come away and be with the Lord.

You need times where God strengthens you and this is what happened to Elijah. He ran around doing good things. Now, if you're running around and in wrong places with wrong people, doing wrong things, that'll dissipate and grieve the Holy Spirit's power in you faster than anything.

The battery totally goes dead then because how can God strengthen us if we're living a lifestyle that is involved with wrong actions, wrong things, wrong attitudes, bitterness and all of that? That'll just dry out your battery. You can't be strong and living a counter-Christian lifestyle no matter what anyone says. Always remember that because Christianity is not about how we act in church, it's about how we live every day, amen? So you can't be living against the Bible and then just be saying, okay, God, now the enemy's coming, I'm gonna resist them.

It doesn't work that way, just doesn't work that way. So you run around, then you run down and then you wanna run away. Look at what happened to him because these are the signs when we're running out of juice and we're in a bad place.

Remember, we're Christians, we're saved. Christ lives inside of us but the working out of his life in us day by day is a very delicate matter and it has spiritual laws to it. And one of these laws is if you don't eat for five days or Kyle there, how many days in the hospital, all those surgeries, you can't say to Kyle, come on, get up, Kyle, let's run around the track.

I can't, why? Because I'm weak, why are you weak? Because I've been in a hospital. I've been fed intravenous, I have no exercise. I know he's alive but he's not ready to do what normally he should be doing, am I correct? And this has to do with that daily thing that we're all involved in.

This is what spiritual warfare is about. Satan is always looking for a weak spot. You know that, I've told you so many times, right? I'm fascinated by that, how those crazy female lions, they'll just be watching those zebras and they'll watch and watch and the people are experts at this say, why do they lay so long in the grass waiting before they run? They're looking for the slightest limp.

They always go where there's weakness and injury. They wouldn't care if another zebra ran up in their grill. Lions have grills too.

And if they ran up there, they will not go for that one. They're going for the one that they've labeled, that's the weak one. No wonder the Bible then says, be strong in the Lord.

Be strong, why? We're all gonna be attacked and tempted but to be weak is to whistle and ask him to come and get us. So he wants to run away. What are the signs of like wanting to run away? Well, he becomes a baby.

He becomes full of fear. When Christians get full of fear and anxiety, that means they've run out of grace. For God has not given us a spirit of fear.

Now we're afraid, we're anxious, biting our nails, what's gonna happen and all of that. Same guy who faced 400 prophets of Baal and mocked them when they were praying. Yeah, you know, yell a little louder to your God, he said to the false prophets.

Maybe he's out of town. And now a lady just says, I'm gonna kill you and he just totally panics, runs for his life. Sits under down underneath a broom bush and now feeling sorry for himself.

That's the other thing, not just fear, when you feel sorry for yourself and you get negative. The world's against me. Look at the wickedness that's going around.

That's a sign someone's running out. They've been running around, they've run down and now they wanna run away. So you don't have to physically run away like Elijah tried to do.

There's other ways that we run away when we get down spiritually and the Lord hasn't strengthened us. We haven't depended on him, spent time with him. You wanna run away from your calling.

Now listen, we watch this. How many over the years, Carol's had a choir and many times the choir members, they step down for a good reason. One of the girls, she and her husband are now expecting a baby or a job changes and they can't keep the commitment.

But I've tracked this for a long, long time. When someone steps down sometimes, they say, why are they stepping down? Because they've witnessed that that's their calling. Oh, they just need a rest and then we follow it.

They don't join another ministry like they said. Soon they're not coming to church at all. The real reason was they ran around, they ran down and now they wanna run away.

You run away from your calling. You run away for living for Christ. Think of all the preachers now who are on TV, who are con artists.

You think they started out that way? I don't think so. How about all these preachers preaching false doctrine and living compromised lifestyles? And yet in Bible school, they were like, God, I wanna be holy like you, Jesus. I wanna live exactly like you.

Why would they compromise like that? Don't you get it? They ran around, they ran down and now they're running away from what they know is true. They'll justify it, but it's a spiritual thing. They just don't have the grace and the strength to keep on the straight and narrow.

Didn't Jesus say the road is narrow that leads to eternal life, but wide is the road. So you join the wide road group. And oh, I used to believe that, but it's a new day.

When you hear people say it's a new day, that means just know this, they ran out of juice. God doesn't change ever. How many are happy? God never changes His ways, His word.

So you run away from trusting God and problems. You run away seeking God and waiting for His counsel. See, it takes so much strength to live by faith and wait for God to open the door.

Because when God doesn't open the door, instead of waiting, you don't have the strength to wait. It takes strength to wait for God. So what do you do? You act.

You act and you make a decision. And then later you wish, what was I thinking? Why did I make that decision? Why? It's because we didn't have the strength to say, wait a minute, God's gonna take care of this. I got a couple of situations right now I'm facing I have no idea what to do.

Not involving any situation here, but elsewhere. I have no idea what to do, but I've been brought into the situation. And I told my wife last night, you know, that verse in Isaiah 50 that says, "Let him who trusts in the Lord, "who is the servant of the Lord, "but who walks in darkness, "let him keep his trust in the Lord, his God." Because sometimes in life, you walk in darkness, not spiritual darkness, but you don't know what to do.

How many have been living through things you don't know what to do? Come on, lift your hand. I'm not talking about a moral decision. That's what we find in the Bible, right and wrong.

But do I do this? Do I not do this? This happened, now what do I do? Now what do I do? It takes strength from God to say, I don't see what's, I don't understand God, I don't understand what's happening, and I don't know what to do. But I'm gonna trust in you. I'm gonna trust in you, I'm gonna wait.

Takes great strength to do that. A lot of the heartaches we bring on ourselves is because we didn't have the strength to wait on God and trust him. So when you run around, you run down, then you get so tired, you feel sorry for yourself, I'm the only one.

God tells them later, I got thousands who haven't bowed their knee to Baal. But that's what happens when you run down, you feel like you're all alone, the world's against me, and then a lot of times you want counsel, and how can somebody counsel you and change anything if you're weak in the Lord? Could you please just explain that to me? If you're not vertically getting grace from God for strength what could I say to you that could change that? No, that same person who can't handle life, when they get strong in the Lord, they go, Pastor Simba, thank you for praying with me, God is good, he's gonna work this out. I thought you needed to talk to me.

Nope, God got it, don't worry about it, I don't need to talk to you. I talk to God about it. That's what happens.

Not that there's anything wrong in counseling, we need counsel, we need to consult with other people, but when you run down, you run away, you run around, you run down, you run away, you wanna run away. And you leave what the lifestyle God wants for you, I've seen that over the years, so sad. If you would play, my brother, so sad.

See ministers just doing crazy things, and they go, no, it's a new day, and I tell them, hey, wake up, there's no new day with God. What do you think, God has certain truths that only last for a few hundred years, then he changes them? No, you can do that now, you can do that, you can sleep around, you can do that, because God is love and he'll work everything out and all of that. It's not that at all.

They just ran out of gas, that's what it is. You just run out of strength, you wanna run away. Hey, I don't know that, twice in the first 18 months, two years of being a minister, I tried to resign twice.

Why? Because I was running around in my own strength, then I ran down, my batteries went to nothing, and then I thought, how can I get out of this? Just too many discouragements. Just every kind of crazy thing happening, I couldn't cope with it, and instead of going deeper in God, I just panicked. You've panicked, haven't you ever? Instead of trusting in God, when you're weak, you panic, like, don't tell me it can't happen to us, because if it happened to Elijah, it could happen to anybody.

How about this verse in Matthew? Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will, what? Give you rest. I will give you rest. Rest, why? Because you need to rest.

You know, just, can I say something physically here for someone here, maybe? Listen, sometimes it's God's perfect will, you know what his perfect will is? Take a nap. When I hear the schedules that some people keep, and they're running around at midnight, two, three in the morning, then they get up and work, and all of that, you know what? If your body runs down, it'll have an effect on your spiritual life. You don't eat properly, you don't exercise, you don't do whatever, and then you're wondering why the whole thing is just dragging down.

Remember, the spirit affects the body, but the body can also affect the spirit. You need time just to refresh from the Lord. Times of refreshing.

Oh, listen, it's one of my favorite verses in the whole New Testament. Look at it, it's found in Acts. Repent then, Peter says, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.

How many love that part? Say amen. Amen. That times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

You know, that's the closest word to revival found in the New Testament. That's a very odd verb for times of refreshing. It means recovery from times of heat, when you're just in the desert, and you're worn out and dehydrated.

God comes, he gives you water, he gives you food, he feeds you with bread. Mm, I've had that happen so many times to me. It bears repeating just one more time.

We were in this project, Diane Rathjen, who's working then here at the church, was the liaison with the contractor and everything, and I had been traveling, running around. Yeah, exactly, running around. Don't know about the wisdom of all those things.

God wants you to do certain things, but then sometimes you just say yes to everybody, you start running around. So, I'm about to go in, Carol's away, doing a project or something, and Diane calls me in the morning. I was gonna stay home, I was dead tired, and I needed to be with the Lord.

And she says, they just called, they're walking off the job next Tuesday, like in, or Monday, there's new requisitions came in from the contractor. Electrical, whatever, going on. This building was just being fixed, and we've run out of money, and we need \$650,000, Pastor, by Tuesday, or they're gonna walk off the job, and if one walks off, they're all gonna walk off.

And I'm like, oh God. Okay, I'll be in in an hour. I'm getting my clothes on, didn't want to.

Wasted. Anybody here ever been wasted? Every, all wastees, please lift your hand, okay? All right, good. I was wasted.

That's a good word, I just made up that word. So, as I'm putting on my shirt, I can see myself exactly where I was. The Lord speaks to me and says, where are you going? Where am I going? Going to church, how about that? I have a job, like Pastor.

I represent the congregation. I have to figure this out. I don't know what to do.

How are we gonna get that kind of money? Don't go. Stay with me. I can't.

It's too important. Don't go. Just be with me.

You need me more than \$650,000. That's how you have to look at it. So, I call to the office, not coming in.

No, I'm not. Put the phone down, go up to the top floor of that house I was living in. There's a little room there with Bibles, bottle of water, a few books, like a little attic room, and I was there for six, seven hours with the Lord.

Nothing changed in my life in terms of circumstances, but when I walked out of that room, I was a different person. God fed me with his word. His presence came.

He baptized me with a peace. I preached on peace. I thought I knew the peace of God that passes all understanding.

I actually said out loud, as God is my witness, I said in the room, what is that? That's how deep I could feel something happening inside of me. And the best I could recognize, God said, that's my peace. You need my peace.

You need rest. And this is the truth. While I was up there for that day, it came down around dinner time, after dinner, something like that.

God supplied the money that we needed without me even doing anything about it. Come on, is God awesome? Oh, wait a minute. Just thought of a verse.

They that wait upon the Lord shall. There's a time for everything under the sun. There's a time to hear Bible.

There's a time to sing, jump around, the choir swaying, and all that. There's a time for everything. And then there's a time.

Wait, my soul, upon the Lord. Seasons of refreshing. You know what you need? You need a fresh touch from Jesus.

You know how Elijah got better? He experienced in a new way the presence of the Lord, not in fire or an earthquake or wind, but in a shh, shh, shh. Shh, shh. Shh.

And God said, I'm not done with you. You got a lot more stuff to do. That's why I needed to draw you aside.

Remember when the disciples came back from hard ministry? What did Jesus say to them? Let's go to Disneyland or a world? No. He said, come away with me into the wilderness and let's be alone for a while. Why? Because you give out? Who's gonna feed you? The webcast is seen by tens of thousands of people.

Some minister watching this, listen to me, I have a word for you, I believe from the Lord. Don't quit. Don't give up and don't run away.

Just get back to being with the Lord. Let his presence strengthen you. Let his word feed you.

He'll give you new energy to keep going. The devil wants you to quit. It's always too soon to quit.

Never quit. Missionary, pastor, whoever, never quit. God has more for you to do, more for all of us to do.

Let's close our eyes. Anybody here, this is for all of us, obviously, but anyone here just, pastor, I needed that word. I'm in the choir.

I'm gonna get up and stand behind you. Or I'm in the balcony or downstairs. I needed that word.

I wanna come forward and tell the Lord now, I do not wanna run around. I don't wanna run down and I don't wanna run away. I need your strength.

I need a renewal. I need refreshing, times of refreshing from your presence, Lord. Just get up out of your seat and come and stand here.

I can let the other people go, but we can stay for a while. Come on, we can stay for a while. Vitamin C and D will not do it for you.

That will help your body, but your spirit needs the Lord. Just get out of your seat and come stand right in front here with me. Facing discouragements, facing difficulties.

I wanna pray for one more thing before we leave, okay? The statistic now has gone to 1,700 pastors in America every month are leaving the ministry. Now look at me. Are there some of those who probably were never called to the ministry? Someone sent them out with just zeal and they love the Lord and all that, but they were really not gifted and called to be a pastor.

I'm sure there's some of those, but don't tell me all 1,700 were never called by God. They were called by God. Why would they leave? You could say a lot of reasons, but the bottom line reason is when you run down, you wanna run away.

Can't face it anymore. Can't try to raise that money. Can't preach ineffectively.

Nobody's getting converted and all that. So I want us to lift. Everyone lift your hands up for all the pastors in America.

Come on. Come on, lift up. Begin to pray out loud for every pastor.

If you know some, name them or a state, name them. Every pastor in West Virginia, Lord. I lift up every pastor there, Lord, that you would strengthen them.

Don't let them run away. Do not let them run away. Strengthen them.

Draw them aside. Speak to them, Lord. Every pastor up in Rhode Island, Lord.

Every pastor in Rhode Island. All those pastors struggling. Even this morning, they're facing discouragements of every kind.

Encourage them. Lift them up, God. Lift them up.

Lift them up. Strengthen them, God. Bless all the men and women of God who are serving you, Lord.

All our missionaries, we ask you to strengthen them, God. Don't let them run down. Men want to run away.

Lord, I thank you for your word that seasons of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord. Not going to church, not hearing a preacher preach. Those are all helpful.

But seasons of refreshing from visitations by your Holy Spirit. Would you teach us all that importance? And would you help us, Lord, to learn how to get away, get alone, and open our hearts so that you can visit us and give us a refreshing, a renewal? We need it every day. God, I need it five times a day, some days.

Strengthen my precious brothers and sisters here that are at the altar, and the whole congregation. Because there's work to do, but we can't do it if we have no strength. So refresh us, strengthen us.

We're gonna do it. We're gonna do it, Lord. We're gonna do it because you're gonna strengthen us.

Come on, let's put our hands together. You're gonna strengthen us. Day by day.

Let the peace of God, which passes all understanding, the shalom of God, be upon your people. People today, we ask it in Jesus' name, and everyone said, amen.

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