

# **Lectio Divina Practice**

## **1 Kings 19:3-18**

### **RELAX & REFOCUS (silencio)**

Exhale and inhale a few times. Relax your neck and move it around. Then let your arms go limp and relax the legs and ankles. Relax each part from the inside out. Quiet your thoughts and open yourself to God.

Optional: After you've quieted yourself, ask yourself the following question to help focus your thoughts for meditation on today's passage: When, if ever, have you felt like saying, "I have had enough, Lord"? If you haven't felt that way, what experience could possibly bring on those feelings?

## **READ (lectio)**

Read the passage to yourself. Then read the notes below it about the italicized words and phrases. Consider how these details affect your understanding of the story. Then read the passage aloud slowly. Take time to let the words “fall” on your ear.

### **1 Kings 19:3-18**

#### Elijah Flees in Fear

<sup>3</sup> Elijah *was afraid* and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, <sup>4</sup> while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”

#### Tender Mercies

<sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” <sup>6</sup> 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 lay down again.

<sup>7</sup> 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.” <sup>8</sup> So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he *traveled forty days and forty nights* until he reached *Horeb*, the mountain of God. <sup>9</sup> There he went into a cave and spent the night.

#### Conversation With The Almighty

And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

<sup>10</sup> He replied, “I have 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.”

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a *gentle whisper*. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

<sup>14</sup> He replied, “I have 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.”

#### God Gives Elijah Work to Do

<sup>15</sup> The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, *anoint* Hazael king over Aram. <sup>16</sup> Also, *anoint* Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and *anoint* Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. <sup>17</sup> Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will *put to death* any who escape the sword of Jehu. <sup>18</sup> Yet I reserve *seven thousand* in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

#### ITALICIZED WORDS & PHRASES

*was afraid:* Ahab and Jezebel, monarchs of Israel, worshipped Baal, a foreign god that Elijah prophesied against. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest in which Elijah proved God's power by calling down fire from heaven on his sacrifice. Baal's prophets got no response for their sacrifice, "lost" the contest and were killed.

*bread:* Loaves of bread were flat, like extra-thick pancakes. This substantive food fueled Elijah for forty days on his 200 mile journey.

*angel of the Lord:* The "angel of the Lord" is the one who appeared to Hagar to help her in the wilderness, to Abraham to keep him from sacrificing Isaac, to Moses in the burning bush, to Gideon in the winepress, to Manoah's wife to predict the birth of Samson, and to Balaam on his donkey (Gen 16:7-11; 22:11-19; Ex 3:2; Num 22:22-35; Judg 13:3-21).

*traveled forty days and forty nights:* Elijah ran the length of Israel from north to south (90 miles). From there, he ran to Mt. Horeb in the southern tip of Arabia (200-300 miles, depending on the route).<sup>1</sup>

*Horeb:* another name for Mt. Sinai where God conversed with Moses centuries earlier; it's possible Elijah intended to imitate Moses's spectacular meetings with God on Mt. Sinai (Ex 24:15-18; 33:17-23).

*only one left:* Jezebel had ordered the death of all the Lord's prophets (18:4).

*gentle whisper:* Also translated "sound of sheer silence" (NRSV)

*anoint:* To set aside for a special purpose, one of the many prophetic duties including standing up to the wicked and preaching God's messages.

*Hazael:* King of Syria, which would come against the northern kingdom of Israel, cleansing it "without"

*Jehu:* would be the new king of Israel who would cleanse Israel from "within." Anointing Hazael and Jehu assured Elijah that God was not letting the northern kingdom of Israel continue in its then current state of depravity.

*Elisha:* as Elijah's apprentice, continued Elijah's prophetic work, calling Israel to obedience to God and performing miracles.

*put to death:* There's no record of Elisha killing anyone, but he did curse a group of boys (2 Kings 2:23-24).

*seven thousand:* Besides these, Elijah seemed to have forgotten about the one hundred prophets of God that Obadiah told Elijah about (1 Kings 18:4).

## **REFLECT (meditatio)**

### **Cues To Help You Enter into the Story**

#### *Elijah's Flight*

Elijah's fear seems puzzling. He previously stood up to Jezebel and Ahab (1 Kings 17:1; 18:17-40) but suddenly became afraid of them. After he called down fire on the drenched sacrifice to God, Elijah would have been something of a celebrity in. If he fled only because he was afraid of Jezebel, he could have easily fled to Judah to be safe with King Jehoshaphat. Instead, Elijah fled all the way to Beersheba (farther south of Judah) and intended to go farther.

Perhaps his fearful escape transitioned into a pilgrimage. He went on from Beersheba, headed for Mt. Sinai where Moses had his well-known interaction with God. Was Elijah imitating Moses, hoping for a similar encounter? "The cave," (v. 13) is quite possibly the same "hole in the rock" where Yahweh appeared to Moses (Ex 33:17-23).

#### *God's Response*

Part of how God responded to the discouraged prophet, Elijah, was to give him more work to do, including the anointing of a successor, Elisha. Elijah and Elisha bonded to the point that it seems likely that Elijah never again felt he was the "only one left."

### **Fly on the Wall Cue: Picture Elijah under the Tree**

Wearing a garment of haircloth and a wide belt, Elijah collapsed under a solitary broom bush in the desert. A broom bush is a large shrub which can grow up to thirteen feet high. In the middle of a barren, treeless wilderness with animals and unexpected land formations was this shelter where there was usually none.

Elijah's mental and emotional state resembled that of someone standing on a bridge planning to jump (ready for death). The angel saw Elijah and offered him water, "power food," minimal conversation and rest.

## **REFLECT on the Invitation**

Read the passage aloud again. Picture what the various scenes would look like.

- 1) Elijah sitting under the tree
- 2) God providing Elijah tender mercies: sleep, food and sympathy.
- 3) Elijah running off to an even more remote place to seek God
- 4) Elijah watching the great and powerful wind tearing the mountains apart and shattering the rocks, the earthquake and the fire; then finally the gentle whisper.
- 5) Elijah equipped with what he needed to return home.
  - As you picture the passage, what moment or action or phrase stands out to you? Or as you watch the action, what do you see?
  - What does this cause you to think and feel?
  - Why might God have caused that moment, word or phrase to stand out to you?

## **REFLECT a little further**

- How does this passage connect with your life in some way?
- Is there some idea, feeling or intention you need to embrace from it? If so, what?
- What might God be inviting you to be or know or understand or feel or even do?
- What, if any, needs do I sense God asking me to surrender?

Be open to the quiet, but don't feel pressured to come up with an answer.

## **RESPOND (oratio)**

Take a few minutes to respond to God about this in prayer.

- What do you most want to say to God about this experience in Scripture?

## **REST (contemplatio)**

Soak in the scene, phrase, feeling, or interaction which has stood out to you in this passage and consider:

- How did God (or God's actions) seem to you in this passage? What does this tell you about what God is like?

Spend a few minutes soaking in the thoughts that have come to you. This may take the form of worship or simply resting in God's presence.

## **TRYING IT ON (incarnatio)**

Make your own pilgrimage of sorts to a place

- where you have interacted with God before;
- where you were wronged and you need for God to minister to you in that space;
- that seems particularly sacred to you for some reason.

In that place, ask God to help you further let go of fear, frustrations and discouragement.