



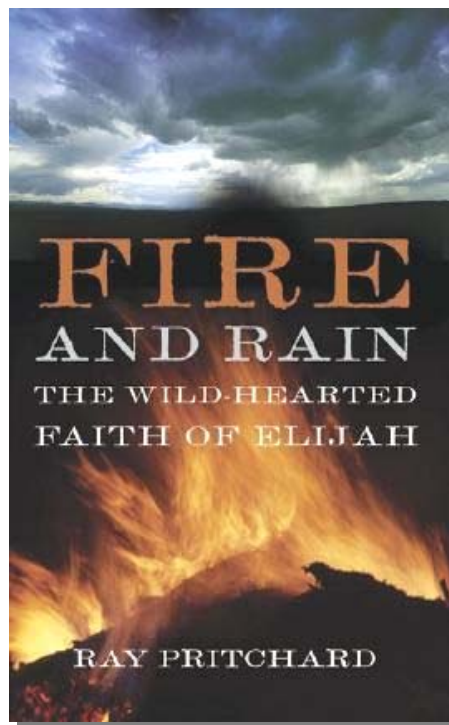
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER

# boot camp in the Ravine

## WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JUNE 13, 2010

LESSON #2 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:



# boot camp in the Ravine

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**H**ow does God get your attention in the *busyness* of today's society? You see, sometimes He needs to put you through a little *boot camp* and requires you to spend some alone time with just Him! But how do you block out the world? In the movie *For the Love of the Game*, Kevin Costner plays aging major league baseball pitcher Billy Chapel pitching in his last game. The scene begins with his team, the Detroit Tigers, playing the New York Yankees. It's an away game and Chapel is being heckled: "Hey Chapel, you stink". Another yells, "You're done!" To concentrate, Billy repeats the phrase "clear the mechanism." When he repeats this phrase, it allows Chapel to clear out all the outside noise—it is now just Chapel and the catcher. Watch the scene from the movie: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAlixu-wL2I>.

I think that describes what God does when He has something He wants us to do and He needs our focused attention. We have to likewise "*clear the mechanism.*" Life tends to get in the way of our relationship with God—thus preventing Him from preparing or training us for some higher calling or task.

As we continue with Week 2 of our study from Dr. Ray Pritchard's book, *Fire and Rain—The Wild-Hearted Faith of Elijah*, today we'll be looking at **HOW** God prepares us to step out with boldness for Him. Last week, we learned that Elijah became a legend because he was a **risk-taker** for God. I hope you took to heart this past week the main challenge of our study of Elijah: **How much are you willing to risk to become all God wants you to be?** Were any of you able to pray the prayer that we talked about last week: **"Lord, do things we're not used to?"**

*Chuck Colson tells the story of Telemachus, a 4th-century Christian monk. This man lived in a remote village, tending his garden and*

*spending much of his time in prayer. One day he thought he heard the voice of God telling him to go to Rome, so he obeyed, heading out on foot. Weary weeks later, he arrived in the city at the time of a great festival. The little monk followed the crowd surging down the streets into the Colosseum. He saw the gladiators stand before the emperor and say, "We who are about to die salute you." Then he realized these men were going to fight to the death for the entertainment of the crowd Telemachus cried out, "In the name of Christ, stop!"*

*As the games began, he pushed his way through the crowd, climbed his way over the wall, and dropped to the floor of the arena. When the crowd saw this tiny figure rushing to the gladiators and saying, "In the name of Christ, stop!" they thought it was part of the show and began laughing. When they realized it wasn't, the laughter turned to anger. As Telemachus was pleading with the gladiators to stop, one of them plunged a sword into his body. He fell to the sand. As he was dying, his last words were, "In the name of Christ, stop!" Then a strange thing happened. The gladiators stood looking at the tiny figure lying there. A hush fell over the Colosseum. Way up in the upper rows, a man stood and made his way to the exit. Others began to follow. In dead silence, everyone left the Colosseum.*

*The year was 391AD, and that was the last battle to the death between gladiators in the Roman Colosseum. Never again in the great stadium did men kill each other for the entertainment of the crowd, all prompted by one tiny voice that could hardly be heard above the roar, one voice that spoke the truth in God's name.*

You know, it takes something to be the only voice. It takes guts to be the lone man or woman, sticking out in a crowd. It takes heart to speak out when it's easier to keep still. It takes courage to stand up when you're standing alone. And it's tough to be alone.

Open your Bible to **1 KINGS 17: 1-5 (NIV)** and refresh your memory of Elijah's sudden appearance before the evil King Ahab

and then continue with what happens after that: *"<sup>1</sup>Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."*

**Continuing with verses 2 through 7:** *"<sup>2</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: <sup>3</sup>"**LEAVE** here, turn eastward and **HIDE** in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. <sup>4</sup>You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there." <sup>5</sup>So he **DID** what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. <sup>6</sup>The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. <sup>7</sup>Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land."*

Whoa! In verse 1, we see Elijah—God’s mountain man, an unknown—coming out of nowhere, appearing before the king, making this brash, bold and risky statement about the God of Israel and there being no rain or dew not for hours or days or weeks, but how long? Years! Whew! Then, just as surprising, look at what happens next. He is told to LEAVE and HIDE! **Why do you think God asked Elijah to LEAVE and HIDE?** The most logical thing would seemingly have been to keep Elijah in the king’s face, pressing the godless monarch into submission, forcing him to surrender his will to the One who had created him. But, so much for human logic!

God’s plan is always full of surprise and mystery. While **WE** might have chosen to leave Elijah there, standing toe to toe with Ahab, God had another plan. God had things He wished to accomplish deep within His servant’s inner life, things that would prepare Elijah for encounters that might destroy a less-obedient, less-committed servant. Listen to these words from the prophet Isaiah in **ISAIAH 55: 8-9 (NLT)**: *"<sup>8</sup>My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. <sup>9</sup>For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."*

Chuck Swindoll, in his book on Elijah, says that *God had two reasons for commanding Elijah to hide himself. First, He wanted to **protect** Elijah from Ahab; and second, He wanted to **train** him to become a man of God. When God says to us, almost out of the blue, "Hide yourself," He usually has both purposes in mind: **protection** and **training**.*

Training! But, in order to accomplish all He wanted to in His servant, He had to have his focus and attention. This will be where the rubber meets the road for Elijah. See, for the godly hero to be useful as an instrument of significance in the Lord's hand, he must be humbled and forced to trust. A. W. Tozer loved to say it this way: *"It's doubtful that God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt Him deeply."* I don't know if you will agree or not, but it has been said that the deeper the hurt, the greater the usefulness. As Dr. Pritchard asked in your Bible study this week, "Are you willing for God to suddenly redirect your steps, especially if that redirection leads you in a way **you** did not **plan** to go?" Are you willing to follow the Lord not just through green pastures by still waters, but are you willing to follow the Lord if the path leads down to a ravine where you must hide yourself?

Next, notice the response of Elijah after God told him to leave and hide! Look again at **1 KINGS 17:5 (NIV)** and tell me what you see: ***5**So he **DID** what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there.*" God called Elijah into a time of solitude and he **OBEYED**. Why is solitude good for us? Why is it important? Why is it necessary? **Solitude uniquely enables us to sense the PRESENCE of God. Does anyone have a recent example of a time of solitude in their life which enabled them to sense God's Presence?**

Your memory verse today is one you already know—**PHILIPPIANS 4:19 (NKJV)**—which says just what we need to be reminded of often: *"And my God shall supply **all your need** according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.* With this in mind,

look back at **1 KINGS 17:4** and notice the first thing God does after He sends Elijah to boot camp in the ravine. He tells him HOW he's going to survive. This is going to be a tough and lonely experience, a survivalist adventure, therefore, God gives Elijah a remarkable promise: *"<sup>4</sup>You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there."* The raven will be the catering service, bringing provisions to His prophet. Isn't that incredible?

And that's exactly what happened. Listen as I read **1 KINGS 17: 6-7** again: *"<sup>6</sup>The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. <sup>7</sup>Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land."* Uh-oh! What's happening? The brook dries up. Elijah was in a tough spot—a life-threatening spot. Had God forgotten His faithful servant?

Do you ever feel as if God has forgotten you? Has He left you all alone? When we hit a tough spot, our tendency is to feel abandoned, to become resentful, to think, *"How could God forget me?"* In fact, just the opposite is true, for at that moment, we are more than ever the object of His concern. As I prepared the lesson this week, I was reminded several times of how I reacted to those times when I felt alone—abandoned by God. According to Chuck Swindoll, during these alone and ravine times two things are certain: (1) God is still alive and well! (2) He knows what He's doing. No slips—no oops—no I forgot!

When your brook dries up, I have three perfect verses that will serve as an encouraging reminder of WHO is in control and that you're not forgotten. Turn to **ISAIAH 49: 14-16 (ESV)** and listen as I read: *"<sup>14</sup>But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.' <sup>15</sup>'Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. <sup>16</sup>Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me."*

Don't you just love the first line of that verse? *"The LORD has forsaken me...He has walked away...He has totally forgotten me."* Ever said that? Of course you have. You can think of some many times when you wondered where God was in your life. But notice what God says, in the midst of your dried-up brook, *"You are written on the palms of my hands. You are continually before Me."* No matter what you think, God reminds you that He has not forgotten you. He says, *"Trust Me through this."*

God was working through some important training for His prophet, Elijah, because He knew what was ahead for him. On Day 2 of your Bible study this week (Page 20), Dr. Pritchard says, *"God's will is revealed one step at a time."* **Why do you think God doesn't give us a road map and lay out the whole plan for us?** God knows where Elijah is going and what's going to happen. That's something we don't know—where we're going or what the future holds in store for us. But I, for one, am so glad that I don't. If right now I knew everything that faced me in the coming year, I would be scared to the point of sleeplessness. But God knows. How gracious of Him to lead us one step at a time, which is exactly what He does with Elijah. And Elijah responds with trust and obedience—one step and one day at the time.

**Did you think about WHY the brook dried up?** It was in direct response to Elijah's prayer, was it not? Listen to the words of **JAMES 5:17 (NIV):** *"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and **it did not rain** on the land for three and a half years."* So, the dried-up brook was just an indication that the very thing that Elijah had prayed for was beginning to take place. He was living in the result of his own prayer. Haven't you had that happen before? *"Lord, make me a godly man. Lord, mold me into a woman after your own heart."* Meanwhile, in your heart you're thinking, *"but don't let it hurt too much."* We want instant maturity, not the kind that requires sacrifice or emotional pain or hardship. *"Lord, give me patience...and I want it right now!"* God's spiritual boot camp does

not work like that. It is designed for our development toward maturity, not for our comfort. But self-denial is not a popular virtue in today's society, is it?

There are four lessons we can learn from Elijah's boot camp in the ravine as the prophet is being made into a man of God:

**First: We must be as willing to be set aside as we are to be used.** This is what F. B. Meyer calls *"the value of the hidden life."* We must be willing to be set aside so we can listen for God's voice in the stillness...away from the noise of everyday life, away from our own busyness, our own agendas, our own desires. We need to learn the deep and enduring value of the hidden life.

**Second. God's direction includes God's provision.** God says, *"Go to the brook. I will provide."* Look again at our memory verse today and tell me what Paul says there? *"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."*

Even when we can't see what God is doing in our life and HOW we will make it, He's in charge and handling the situation. Dr. Tony Evans tells the story about a man in a hurry to catch an airplane. He ran, huffing and puffing, down toward his gate. He passed a guy who was dressed in a pilot's uniform. The guy said to the breathless man, "Where are you in a hurry to?" "Oh," the man said, "I am late for my plane. I don't want to miss my plane." He proceeded to tell the guy what flight he was hurrying to.

The uniformed man said, "Don't be in a hurry, I'm the pilot of that plane." If the pilot is chilling, you chill too. Don't stress yourself out about things unnecessarily. Wait on God and trust that if He's taking His time, you can too. When God directs, He provides. That's what sustained Elijah during his boot camp experience.

**Third. We have to learn to trust God one day at a time.** As you read in your lesson this week, God's blessing comes only

AFTER we obey—not before. And sometimes obedience is just plain scary to us, isn't it?

In *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, Jim Cymbala, author and pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, tells the story of the first financial obstacle he faced upon coming to the tiny church: When the first mortgage payment rolled around at the end of the month, the checking account showed something like \$160 in hand. We were going to default right off the bat. How soon would it take to lose the building and be tossed out into the street? That Monday, my day off, I remember praying, "Lord, you have to help me. I don't know much—but I do know that we have to pay this mortgage."

I went to the church on Tuesday. Well, maybe someone will send some money out of the blue, I told myself, like what happened so often with George Mueller and his orphanage back in England—he just prayed, and a letter or a visitor would arrive to meet his need. The mail came that day—and there was nothing but bills and fliers. Now I was trapped. I went upstairs, sat at my little desk, put my head down, and began to cry. "God," I sobbed, "what can I do? We can't even pay the mortgage." That night was the midweek service, and I knew there wouldn't be more than three or four people attending. The offering would probably be less than ten dollars. How was I going to get through this?

I called out to the Lord for a full hour or so. Eventually, I dried my tears—and a new thought came. Wait a minute! Besides the mail slot in the front door, the church also has a post office box. I'll go across the street and see what's there. Surely God will answer my prayer! With renewed confidence I walked across the street, crossed the post office lobby, and twirled the knob on the little box. I peered inside... Nothing.

As I stepped back into the sunshine, trucks roared down Atlantic Avenue. If one had flattened me just then, I wouldn't have felt any lower. Was God abandoning us? Was I doing something that displeased him? I trudged wearily back across the street to the

little building. As I unlocked the door, I was met with another surprise. There on the foyer floor was something that hadn't been there just three minutes earlier: a simple white envelope. No address, no stamp—nothing. Just a white envelope. With trembling hands I opened it to find... two \$50 bills. I began shouting all by myself in the empty church. "God, you came through! You came through!" We had \$160 in the bank, and with this \$100 we could make the mortgage payment. My soul let out a deep "Hallelujah!" What a lesson for a disheartened young pastor! To this day I don't know where that money came from. I only know it was a sign to me that God was near—and faithful.

**Fourth. A dried-up brook is often a sign of God's pleasure, not disappointment, in your life.** Now, as Chuck Swindoll says, if you miss that, you miss it all! The dried-up brook is usually a sign of God's acceptance of us—not His judgment. Remember the story of Abraham, right at the height of his career when he was becoming a great man of God? He was told by the LORD, *"Take Isaac and put him on the altar and kill him."* I would say that that qualifies as Abraham's brook drying up, wouldn't you? Yet God was intensely pleased with his servant.

We see the same thing in Paul's life when he was stoned, shipwrecked, beaten, but God was pleased with his servant. When Joseph was thrown into prison after being falsely accused and misjudged, Joseph's brook had dried up. God, however, was well pleased with His servant—but Joseph had some things to learn.

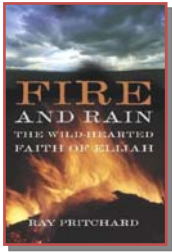
That's us! We're a long way from being the man or woman that God wants us to be and we have to endure a little boot camp in the ravine from time to time. Are you ready? Can you handle it?

**Let's Pray.**



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# 2

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✿ A. W. Tozer loved to say it this way: "It's doubtful that God can \_\_\_\_\_ a man greatly until He has \_\_\_\_\_ Him deeply."
- \_\_\_\_\_ uniquely enables us to sense the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
- According to Chuck Swindoll, during these alone and ravine times two things are certain: (1) God is still \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, and (2) He knows \_\_\_\_\_ He's doing.
- ISAIAH 49: 16 (ESV)** says, "*Behold, I have \_\_\_\_\_ you on the palms of my hands; your walls are \_\_\_\_\_ before me.*"
- The dried-up brook was just an indication that the very thing that Elijah had \_\_\_\_\_ for was beginning to take place. He was living in the \_\_\_\_\_ of his own prayer. Haven't you had that happen before? "Lord, make me a godly man. Lord, mold me into a woman after your own heart." Meanwhile, in your heart you're thinking, "but don't let it hurt too much."
- Four Lessons learned from Elijah's boot camp in the ravine:
  - (1) We must be as willing to be set \_\_\_\_\_ as we are to be \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (2) God's direction includes God's \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (3) We have to learn to trust God \_\_\_\_\_ at a time
  - (4) A dried-up brook is often a sign of God's \_\_\_\_\_, not disappointment, in your life.