August 6/7, 2022

A Strong Finish

Encountering God Series

1 Kings 19:1-18

Pastor Tim Bohlke

It is great to be with you this morning. As I was preparing for this talk this morning and reflecting on the sixteen years I've been on staff and I've been a pastor here at Lincoln Berean Church, there's been so many great things. Most of those years were on the directional team, serving with Bryan Clark and Mark Kremer and Jeff Petersen. We got to see God do so many things; it was amazing. But one of my favorite things has been a surprise. It's been to be able to be here with you and to walk through some of these great, amazing stories of the Bible. And this morning, we're going to take a look at the prophet Elijah and the last stage of his leadership journey in life, and the many things that were piling up that nearly blocked him from taking the next steps he needed to take as God was directing him, and to finish his life and leadership journey well.

A few weeks ago, I was in Crested Butte, Colorado. That's my favorite place in the country. I worked in that area after high school, and I got to go back ever since with family and friends to hike and mountain bike and just soak in the beauty of that place in southwest Colorado. But when I was there this last time, I was reminded of this lifelong goal that I've yet to do: Hike this trail that goes outside of Crested Butte and ends up in Aspen, Colorado. Seventeen miles, it goes over two mountain passes. There's been a lot or reasons why I just have not been able to pull that off, but my excuse over the last few years has been life has just gotten busy.

Several years into this journey of being a pastor here at Lincoln Berean, I was able to start a new organization, a new ministry—Harbor Ministries—and it has been an incredible ride. Harbor Ministries' mission is to come alongside strategic leaders, help them live with a life-changing kind of rhythm, leave a legacy in those they influence, and finish well in their faith. There are three primary leadership venues under Harbor Ministry. *Rhythm in 20* is a three-event, three-year journey for young men, mid-20s to mid-30s; *Rogue*, a two-event, two-year journey for guys upper 30s and up; and, most recently, we launched *Rebel*, a two-event, one-year journey for women leaders and influencers here and around the country. It's been an incredible ride.

But one of the guys that came into one of our early leadership groups was DJ Jergensen. He was a pastor and church planter in Durango, Colorado. And, in a few minutes, you're going to see a bit of his story and some of the obstacles that came into his life that nearly took him out and how he was able to navigate through those. But DJ had a guy in his church that had a considerably bigger vision for his life than my hike from Crested Butte to Aspen. He had a dream and a lifelong goal of hiking the Colorado trail, and, in his 60s, he realized the window was closing. He'd better get serious about it. So, he began to make plans. He was a physician, and he cleared his schedule and began to train to accomplish that goal.

The Colorado trail starts outside of Denver and finishes in Durango, Colorado—a 486-mile hike, 89,000 feet of vertical gain. I mean, it's unreal, and he did it in 36 days! And, as he reflected back on that journey, he said there were many things and many times he wanted to quit and give it up

and stop. There were three primary things that consistently got in his way and caused him to get off track and be ready to quit.

One was weather, things he couldn't control. There was, I believe, a seven, eight, nine-day stretch where he never saw the sun. And you can imagine, kind of, that impact on him. There were half of those days that were some kind of moisture—rain, sleet, snow—and several days where he would wake up in the rain, hike all day in the rain, get in his tent in the rain, figuring out how to keep dry and warm and get the motivation to do it again the next day and take that next step.

The second thing was loneliness. He said he didn't anticipate this, but through those times, the loneliness got so intense that it just about took him out. The only conversation he had was a few times where he'd meet up with his wife and she'd, you know, give him the stuff he needed, the resources for the next leg of his hike. But those were the only conversations he had. He said, "This intense loneliness nearly took me out."

The third thing was weight. This guy was meticulous about the weight he would carry in his pack because he knew, if he took more than the essentials, if he took too much weight in his pack, the cumulative effect of that, over those 486 miles, would take him out. And so he was meticulous to the ounce, to the fraction of an ounce. One thing he did was cut off half of his toothbrush handle. He talked about that, because he knew any fractional amounts, anything that wasn't absolutely essential on that trip, would eventually take him out. So, weight mattered.

The prophet Elijah could relate to this story. Things outside of his control were beginning to pile up toward the end of his life, and the resulting fear and fatigue and disappointment nearly took him out. Loneliness and the excess weight he was carrying of emotional and spiritual baggage, as it came through this tough life that he had been living, nearly took him out. And when we pick up the story here in 1 Kings 19, Elijah finds himself under a lone tree in the desert and he's asking God to take his life. He's done!

So, a quick summary of the prophet Elijah before we dig into the passage and the text. Elijah was living at a time when Israel was moving through a dark time. The people of Israel and the leaders of Israel were turning away from God, turning their backs on Him, and moving toward false gods and idol worship, specifically the god Baal. And the leaders of the day, the king and the queen, were fiercely committed to this idol worship, and they were leading the people astray. So God rose up the prophets, and specifically Elijah, to be His truth-teller, to warn the people and the leaders of the day that there would be consequences for this. So, God sends Elijah to King Ahab and tells him, "You're leading the people astray. They're going down a dark path. There will be consequences." But King Ahab's heart hardened, and what follows is a three-and-a-half-year drought. And we see Elijah at a moment in 1 Kings, pleading with God on behalf of the people, saying, "I don't know how long the people can take this." And so God sends Elijah back to King Ahab for another shot to confront the false prophets, the false teachers of the day, those that were committed to the idol Baal. And so he goes and gives King Ahab another shot and puts the false prophets of the day to the test. Lots of things happen, but what ends up ultimately happening is Elijah kills those prophets and wipes them out, basically by himself. And when King Ahab goes to his wife, Jezebel, and tells her what Elijah has done, Jezebel sends a message to Elijah. "By the

way, just like you killed my prophets over here, by tomorrow night, you're dead." And so, when we enter this story in 1 Kings 19, Elijah has come to fear and he's running for his life.

So, if you want to turn with me and follow this with me, it's 1 Kings 19, and we'll walk through this story. We'll start right at the beginning:

> **Now Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with his sword. Then Jezebel sent a message to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like one of them."** (Translation: You're dead tomorrow night FYI.) Verse 3:
> **And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a lone broom tree; and he asked for himself to die, and said, "Enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers."** (*NASB, 1 Kings 19:1-4)

Elijah is alone, discouraged. Discouraged is not a strong enough word. Despairing…he's done! You don't get a sense in this passage that he's mad at God. He just seems more disappointed in himself. "I just couldn't get this done." And so he's ready to give up; he's at the end of his rope. Verse 5:

> **Then he lay down and fell asleep under a broom tree; but behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat!" And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a round loaf of bread baked on hot coals, and a pitcher of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. But the angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat; because the journey ahead of you is long." So he arose and ate, and drank, and he journeyed in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. Then he came there to a cave and spent the night there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"** (Vs. 5-9)

I mean, this is a really cool moment in the story. So, Elijah has hit the wall. He's asked God to take his life. The obstacles and the culture are too great, have turned against God for him. He doesn't see a way through it. He's ready to give up. God meets him in a place and gives him exactly what he needs: food, rest, drink, and a chance to be honest. And it wasn't just food. He didn't, like, throw a piece of bread and a glass of water at him, right? It's a really cool picture that God gives him in the moment of this desperate time. He gives him a rounded loaf of bread, baked on hot coals, and a pitcher of water. Abundance! He gives him everything he needs to get strong. And then He gives him a chance to be honest, right? He asks him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And Elijah takes Him up on it, right? In Verse 10, it says:

> **And he said, "I have been very zealous for you, Lord, the God of armies;"** (Another translation says, "I've worked my heart out for you, God.") **"for the sons of Israel have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they have sought to take my life as well.**

So, this is the critical moment in the story. This is the critical moment in Elijah's journey as a prophet. What does God do in this moment? Elijah has poured out his heart. ***"I've worked my heart out for you, God.*** But it seems to be to no avail. I'm ready to give up. They've killed everybody. I'm the only one left." What does God ask him to do in this moment? "Turn and get back to work," or does He say something very different? Verse 11:

> **So He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain at attention before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and powerful wind was tearing out the mountains and breaking the rocks in pieces before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind, there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire, a sound of a gentle blowing.** (Another translation says, "After the fire, came a gentle, quiet whisper." God showed up. It may have taken awhile, but God showed up.) **When Elijah heard it** (this whisper, this gentle blowing), **he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"** (The story starts to turn. He re-asks the question, and Elijah answers again. But get the context of the story now. Elijah is in a different place, right? And so, when he answers this, the tone of his answer, I think, feels very different.) **"I have been zealous for You, LORD, the God of angel armies; for the sons of Israel have abandoned Your covenant, tore down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they have sought to take my life."** (Vs. 11-14)

And you get the sense that they seek to take his life away, so what does he need to do? Elijah is now in a different place. He's rested. He's well fed. He's had a drink. He's had a thin-place moment on the mountain with God, and God showed up. He's got the confidence to know that God is still with him and still speaking with him. Elijah is in a different place. He seems ready. And now, in this context, God gives him the mission that will be the rest of his leadership life and journey. Verse 15:

> **The Lord said to Elijah, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you've arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king of Aram. You shall also anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi, king over Israel;** (So this is no small thing, right? I mean he's anointing a new king, so he's going in and he's ready to roll with that.) …**and you shall anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah as prophet in your place.** (He's giving him his marching orders. Elijah is ready. And then He gives Elijah this great gift. In verse 18, we skip down to that. It's amazing.) **Yet, I will leave seven thousand in Israel, and all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him will be there.** (Vs. 15-18)

What has he told Elijah in this moment? He's met the need of loneliness. "You're not alone. You're not the only one. There are 7,000 more that are not giving in and worshipping this false god. You're not alone." (And in this time we live in, this culture, don't we often feel like, "Man, is there anyone else out there?" I mean, that's kind of standing in the gap.) God reassures Elijah in this moment, "You're not alone; there are others. You're not doing this for yourself. You're doing this

because I've asked you to do it. You're doing it for them, too. You're not alone." A powerful moment in this story!

So, a couple of observations from this. One, God meets Elijah right where he's at, right in that place of need in the first part of 1 Kings 19, right? And what's the message? "My gosh, Elijah, you're my chosen prophet. Get up, get back at it; go! Keep going. Don't you have enough faith?" (That's what we're told a lot. Is that what God did?) I mean, He entered right into Elijah's story, right where he's at, and gave him abundant food and abundant drink, told him to get healthy; abundant rest, because we know he goes back to sleep again and again, enough that he has strength built up for a forty-day move to the mountain. And then God invites Elijah to solitude on the top of the mountain, and says, "Wait, give attention to God, because God is going to pass by, but you need to wait for it." Look at Verse 11 again. I'm going to read it in a different translation. Verse 11 says:

> **Then Elijah was told, "Go stand on the mountain at attention before God and God will pass by. A hurricane ripped through the mountain and shattered rocks, but God was not in the wind. The wind—after the wind, an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, a fire, but God was not in the fire; and after the fire, came that gentle, quiet whisper.** (*MSG, 1 Kings 19-11-12)

When I read that again, I wondered how long that took. You know, when we read the Bible, often we read it so fast and…and in that moment kind of thing—a hurricane wind ripped through, then an earthquake, fire came, and then God showed up—it happened in ten minutes or so, right? Not likely! I mean, I don't have the context and know this, but likely this was a long time on the mountain where he stood at attention and waited for God, that these things happen. We know there's history on this mountain. I mean, God took leaders there. I know of one leader that waited 40 days on that mountain for God to show up and move. We know this history. This likely took quite a while. But that's a key part of the story: that God calls him to the mountain, and he has this thin-place encounter and asks him to wait and stand at attention, because God, He will pass by.

Now we see a man with a renewed strength. Now we see this prophet who has a renewed commitment and passion to his calling. Now we see a man that's reconnected with the steely resolve that is such a characteristic of the prophet Elijah. We know this because Elijah went toe-to-toe with the king, and Elijah faced those false prophets of the day, and killed over 100 of them by himself. He had a steel resolve and a courage unmatched, and he's now reconnected with that. He has a recommitment to take the next step God has told him to take, even to the point of replacing himself, and finish this thing well! And this is a really cool and great moment in this story.

I told you when I started, about DJ Jergensen, this pastor and church planter in Durango, Colorado. When DJ came to one of our leadership events, he was so compelling and if I lived in the Durango area this is where I'm going to church. This is a guy I would follow, no doubt, just a great young man and with a passionate, contagious vision. But I knew when he came in, that he was on an unsustainable pace. And I know without a shadow of a doubt, these years later, that he would not be a pastor today if he had not made some adjustments to his life and learned a different kind of way to do leadership and rhythm to make himself healthy and to go forward. That has made him much more in a position to keep pursuing God and keep leading others. So I wanted to give you a glimpse into this story, because it's such a great fit here. And so, let's take a look at this video:

DJ: So, I'm here in Iceland, six years after I started my Rhythm journey, and I could not have imagined, like, how far and how much would happen in the last six years. Six years ago, my wife and I moved to Durango, Colorado, to plant a church. We were ready to charge the hill and reach people for Jesus. We knew it was going to be hard, but what we didn't realize was just how hard it was going to be. There was this rigorous testing we went through that actually uncovered that, down deep, I was going to really thrive at the newness of church planting, but really struggle with the endurance of church planting. And they actually told me, unless some things change, you're going to really struggle to deal with all of the tension and pressure of ministry.

The way I lived life was, I would literally pour out the entire cup. Whatever was in it, I would pour it out until there was nothing, and then I would crash. And then I would wait and it would slowly recharge. And then I would pour it out again. I realize now I was literally stepping into a life that I couldn't sustain. At the same time, we found out about Rhythm in 20, and a friend and I decided to jump in. So within a month of going to Colorado to plant the church, here we are at Rhythm in 20, just like learning how to have space, balance, and endure a call; and yet, at the same time, how to be radical in the way that we pursue what God has called us to do.

You're with 20 other guys who are all saying we want the same thing, you know, we want to make a difference. But we realize it happens with this long, steady, persistent, rooted like, intensity. And that's what I was longing for, going to Rhythm. That's what I've just been longing for in my life. Through the Rhythm journey, Tim and the crew, like literally taught me how to have space. I think what's happened more than anything has been a course correction in terms of how I see myself and how I pursue the meaning and purpose and beauty of God. It has, like, birthed a lot of the backbone that I've needed to be able to sustain, and to continue to sustain, where God has me. It is so hard to sustain that. Anybody can do it for a weekend; anybody can do it for a month. But to do that for a year, and then let a year turn into a decade, and then a decade to turn into generation, you know, we need so much more than just passion. Going through the Rhythm journey taught me how to bring in this other piece of finding space and connecting with God, to the point that I really believe now that I can sustain the calling that God has for me.

So good, right? And so life and leadership and business and ministry, and whatever your vocation or world, it has gotten exponentially more difficult in the last three years since we made that video. I'm really glad that he entered in and made some of the course adjustments he needed to make, because the kind of impact he's having now in southern Colorado is difference-making.

The world you know today and these last few years has been shaken. And as I'm out there speaking and meeting people that have been through different areas of the country, that have been through some of our leadership journeys, my sense is the world has been shaken, and it's not coming back. It's different. You know, the thing about after a severe shaking, like a real severe earthquake, the landscape doesn't return; it changes. People that have been through that kind of thing, they're different; they change. And we need something solid and steady to help us navigate these turbulent times. So I've got a few suggestions for you this morning in this regard, that will help us kind of

navigate the days in front of us during these really, really uncertain, hard times we find ourselves in, this moment in history where we find ourselves.

One is we've got to remember the times God showed up in our story. We can't forget those thin-place moments, those moments when heaven and earth collided, and God decided to show up just for a moment to give us a glimpse of heaven and keep us encouraged to keep taking that next step. I guarantee you, Elijah didn't forget that moment on the mountain when the earthquakes rolled through and the wind and the fire, and then God showed up in this gentle, quiet whisper, telling him that he's got to quiet down if he's really going to hear God in the midst of the chaos, like in which we live. You've got to remember those moments, and I'll give you a chance here in a minute to do just that.

Back in April, I was in San Diego, getting ready for two different leadership events we had. And I wasn't Elijah-tired, but I was tired…pretty weary. And I went in a day early to kind of get my head on right, because we had a lot of guys coming in from around the country with a lot of expectation and hope for that time, and I was worn out. And I remember sitting by the ocean in kind of just a numb state like, for quite a long time. Just, like, "I don't think I've got anything left in the tank to give here." These were the 27th and 28th groups that had come to San Diego for Harbor Ministries. That was on top of about 50 events we'd done in Colorado with different groups. And I just wasn't sure I had the passion, you know, that was needed and deserved for these guys. I just didn't have much in the tank.

And as I sat there, it was a really clear, beautiful day. There wasn't any mist on the ocean, and you could see the waves lining up ready to come into the shore there. There was this beautiful rhythm to it. And as I kept watching this, this thought kind of came to mind, "Just keep coming. Just keep taking the next step. I'll be with you, you know, just keep coming." And in the midst of that, I felt directed to Isaiah, this passage in Isaiah 58 that I'd read the week before somewhere; I don't remember where, but I felt directed. And it was just like, "Talk about God speaking in the moment!" Isaiah 58:10 says:

> **…Help those in trouble and the light will shine out of the darkness. The Lord will guide you continually and give you water when you're dry and restore your strength. You will be like a well -watered garden, an ever-flowing stream.**

And in that moment, I tell you, it wasn't like I popped up and like, "Let's go; I'm ready, you know, a hundred percent." No! But there was this kind of slow-building strength that happened. The wind began to come back in the sails, and I really had a strong sense God was in this moment. And I would tell you, the next eight days we were all in with all these guys, and every day I felt just a little bit stronger, not more depleted. That thin-place moment at that ocean changed things, and I'm not going to forget it going forward. As long as God calls me into this moment, I can't forget that moment.

Sometimes it's a lot simpler. Last week I got a text from a guy out in Denver of a real brilliant, double rainbow which he sent to me. And he said, "You remember that double rainbow we had on the last morning of *Rogue* where we were all standing on a deck, just like mesmerized by it?" He said, "God just used this rainbow to remind me of it." Could be that simple, right? But not just

that simple. Because this guy was driving to work. He had to pull his car off in Denver, take a picture of the rainbow, and he attended to the moment that God was giving him. It changed it…changed everything.

So, the second thing: we've got to keep our loads light. Life is too short. I mean, we're all feeling such emotion these days, and an anger. I mean, I don't even know where the anger comes from that I'm feeling, but it just rises up. And that's a common theme I hear from everybody. We're just kind of wrestling with that kind of emotion, anger, and maybe some unforgiveness—the things that divide us, the narratives that have been put in front of us to keep us separate and divided. Life is too short to carry that stuff. There's no way we're going to finish well if we don't figure out how to let some of this go, how to release some of that, and keep only the essentials in the pack that we're carrying going forward. These times demand something different from us if we're going to be kind of the difference-makers, and not only do this well and survive through this time but thrive in it. We've got to keep our loads light.

And I wonder this morning if something is coming to your mind in regard to that, that you just maybe need to let go. Nothing magic, no magic way to do this. For me, it's every morning, you know, on the porch when I'm at home. I just kind of ask God that question: "Is there anything I need to release today and that You need to take, because I can't carry this. I don't know how to do this well, to release this.

So, we can't talk about these two things without giving you a chance to practice it this morning. So, if we were in one of our Harbor Ministry leadership journeys out in Colorado, I'd be giving you three hours to work on this. But this morning, I'm giving you three minutes. When you came in, you got a handout that has "Remember" on it. Hopefully you have something to write with. We're going to give you a few minutes to spend on these two things I just talked about. It's going to be quick. But I would love to have you think about and remember a time, maybe recently, that God just showed up, that made Himself real to you. It might be something really simple, or it might be something more significant. I don't know. But what comes to mind? Write it down. Don't forget it, because that's the stuff that's going to give you fuel in the days ahead. And then we don't have near enough time to work through this lighten-load idea, but I would encourage you to say what was the first thing that came to mind, and I bet there's a bunch of you in this room where something came right to mind when I said that. Is there something you just need to let go of and give to God? Let Him take it for this next stage. And whatever that thing was that just popped in your mind, write that down. You can think about this and process it and test it more later in terms of that. But maybe write the first thing that came to mind. We're just going to give you three minutes to do this and then I'll be back with you to finish up……..

I'd encourage you to take that card with you because I think those two things are really important questions for you as you are shoring up and strengthening up for the journey ahead of us in this next stretch and this next season we have in life and, as well, as in this country.

The third thing I would mention to you is to practice this idea of space, this time to go to the mountain and attend and listen to God and wait for Him to show up. In Harbor Ministry, we call that idea, space. And when guys come in to one of our leadership journeys, we actually challenge them to consider taking a full day of space, of quiet, of solitude, of disconnecting from the noise

in the world around us, taking in some Scripture, and then just really listening and waiting on God, and see what He has. Try doing that a day a month. If you've been to church here for a long time, you've heard me speak before; you know I've talked about this. This is a passionate area of mine, and I think it's a difference-making practice. Those that do what we challenge them to do going forward, they're the difference-makers. That separates them. That's what brings a weightiness to life that others gravitate toward and want to do something different. And we've got that in front of us. I would encourage you to think about what would an hour a week look like for the rest of this year of where you're just kind of disconnecting from the noise, turning off the phone, separating, and really seeking God in the minute? An hour a week, is that possible with only four-months-plus left in 2022? Life goes so fast. Is there a way to slow it down a little bit and just take an hour a week to really seek God?

We've got a tool that I want to give you this morning to help with this. We wrote and produced this real simple tool earlier this year and gave it to all the leaders that have been through one of our Rhythm in 20, Rogue, Rebel events, and sent that to them all around the country. But we produced a bunch of these this morning and wanted to give you one. It's real simple, just some verses in there. Hebrews 12, that passage I referenced, is in here, and some questions about it. And there are some open pages to journal some notes. We've got a booth set up out in the communication center here on the main level. Go out there and they'll give you one of these. And, as well, there's some information on Harbor Ministries, if you want to check out more of what we're doing and what we're about as an organization. But we'd love to give you these. Grab one on your way out. If you want to grab one for somebody else as well, that'd be great. I think you'll find it really helpful. I would just ask you to really commit to this idea of getting to the mountain, so to speak, in your own backyard, taking an hour, and disconnect and listen to what God may have for you in the moment.

Before I close, just a couple of moments of personal reflection here on my time here at Lincoln Berean. Before I started here over 16 years ago as pastor, I was the Director of Youth for Christ. I left Youth for Christ and came into this role as pastor. And I remember talking to Bryan Clark, and in the midst of that, kind of sharing this little dream I had of coming alongside pastors and strategic leaders around the country. I had no idea what it would look like. One of the things I'll always be thankful for here is the leadership then and now. They had a big vision for what Lincoln Berean could be, and I wasn't afraid of that dream. And as a result, you know, we've had 700-plus leaders in 44 states come through one of our leadership events over the last decade. I mean, it's been an amazing run, and that's something I'll always be thankful for in this place.

Soon I'm going to be transitioning from being a pastor here to fully focus on Harbor Ministry, but this has been a pure privilege to be in this role and to be with you in this way. This is a relationship that will continue; it's a strategic partnership going forward. But it's time to focus differently. In many ways this has been a fulfillment of a lifelong calling. I remember when I was on the back pew in a little Methodist church in central Nebraska when I was little, and the pastor kind of heading back toward me and said, "You know, I think you're going to be a pastor someday." He kind of planted that seed all the way back then, and now Reverend Quaife is up there cheerleading in heaven now. So, these last years have been a great, great run in this capacity. It's been an absolute privilege to be in this role with you and come alongside many of you and want to continue to do that.

As I close today, I wanted to leave you with these words out of Psalm 46, because it's way better words than I could ever put together. This is a really important psalm for the days we're living in, this time of such uncertainty—nations in conflict, likely soon to be more nations in conflict, a world, again that's been shaken. And we need to know that there's something solid that we can hang onto. We need the truth of these words. I guarantee Elijah would have attached the words of Psalm 46 in that story, and we need it today. I just feel like these are words that can encourage you and me today. So, instead of following along with this, just let me read this to you. It's kind of a closing moment, a closing prayer with you in this season, in this stretch of the journey we have together, because I just think these are critical words for the days we live.

God, He's our refuge and our strength. always ready to help in time of trouble, when our back's against the wall. When we're under that lone tree in the desert, wondering if we can go on, take the next step. No matter what we happen to be facing, He's there, our help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when the earthquakes come and the mountains crumble to the sea. Let the oceans roar with foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge. A river brings joy to the city of God, the sacred home of the Most High God dwells in that city. It cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it. The nations are in chaos, but their kingdoms will crumble. God's voice thunders and the earth melts. The Lord of Heaven's army is here among us. The God of Israel, He is our fortress. Hear that again. God's voice thunders, and the earth melts. The Lord of Heaven's army is here among us. The God of Israel is our fortress. Come see the glorious works of the Lord. See how He will bring destruction on the world. He can cause wars to end throughout the earth. He can break the bow. He can snap the spear. He burns shields with fire. He's in control. He's got this, no matter what plays out. He's got this. So be still, be still and know that I'm God. I will be honored in every nation. I will be honored throughout the world. The Lord of Heaven's Armies is right here among us. He's right here. Believe that! That God of Israel is our fortress.

So interestingly, in the midst of this psalm, comes one of the most famous verses in the Bible. In the midst of the chaos, ***Be still and know that I am God****. So, God, that's what we pray this morning, for we know: in the stillness, that's where we can remember. In the stillness, that's where the words can come for the load that we need to lighten, so that we cannot just survive, but thrive during these times. In the stillness, comes strength; in the stillness, comes this reminder that you will be honored throughout the world. In the stillness, comes the reminder that you are right here among us, that the God of Israel, You are our fortress. Amen.*

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