

THE BIG STORM DILEMMA
1 Kings 19:1-18

I recently was putting a jar of mayonnaise back in the refrigerator when I dropped it. It just kind of bounced on the floor and was fine. It would not always have turned out that way. I have a little history with mayonnaise jars. I was in grad school taking a full load of classes and working to support myself. I was working at a grocery store. I was the low man on the totem pole. Everybody in the store was my boss. I was squeezing out an existence on an impossibly small income and working hard to do a good job at work while keeping up in school. Because of my classes I often got late night and weekend shifts. One Saturday evening I was tired and stressed by school, on my way to another late night working, but trying to do my best at the grocery store when I heard over the PA system, "Rick, wet cleanup on aisle 3." I knew that meant I needed a mop, so I retrieved a mop and bucket, then headed to aisle 3. When I arrived I found a pool of liquid on the floor. It was unusual because there were no broken or spilled jars or bottles. I wondered where the liquid came from. Whatever, my job wasn't to be a detective and solve the mystery. It was to mop it up. I bent to the task, and figured out what the fluid was. The odor and the slightly yellowish tint gave it away. Apparently some kid had failed to inform a parent that a potty visit was urgently needed. At least I hoped it was a kid.

I finished that rather noxious task later I heard "Rick, clean up on aisle 10." I headed to aisle 10 and discovered a broken jar of mayonnaise on the floor. This was back in the day when jars were glass instead of the plastic we have today. Today if you drop a jar of mayo it will probably bounce. Back then it shattered and left broken glass and mayo smeared on the floor. Those were not the good old days. What do you use to clean up mayo and broken glass? Have you ever had to clean up a big glob of mayo? If you try to mop it you tend to just smear it around more. I decided I needed to use a scoop to carefully shovel up the glass and as much mayo as possible, then try to mop up the rest. I set about my task and managed to get it all cleaned up. I felt pretty good about how good of a job I had done. I turned to take the mop and bucket back, and when I did, the back end of the mop swung around and knocked a jar of mayo off the shelf. It shattered on the floor. There was a woman standing nearby with her young child observing this. She said, "Oh, that's too bad." I stood there looking at that mayo on the floor and thought, "Really Lord? I graduated from college with a degree in math so I could

do this? I am trying to prepare for a life serving you, and you give me urine puddles and broken mayonnaise jars? Thank you so much.” Have you ever noticed there's not much difference between the words mop and mope?

I was feeling rather sorry for myself. All of us will likely hit a funk that is a little bit like that at some point in our lives, and maybe more than once. That's part of being human. Today we are going to look at a guy who spent some time in that pit of “poor me,” and learn from his example what can help us through such times. Let's look at 1 Kings 19.

ELIJAH FELT AFRAID

After Solomon died Israel experienced something that almost happened in our country in the 1860's. Here 11 southern states tried to secede from the union, resulting in the Civil War. In Israel the 10 northern tribes successfully seceded from the union with the southern 2 tribes leaving two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Sadly the north had a succession of kings that were consistently bad. They pretty much uniformly refused to worship and obey the God of Israel. But none were as bad as Ahab.

Ahab has become a symbol of ungodliness and evil character. People today do not name their sons Ahab. It was no accident that Herman Melville gave the name Ahab to his crazed and doomed captain of the whaling ship Pequod in his classic *Moby Dick*. 1 Kings 16:30 says, “Ahab, son of Omri, did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.” Verse 33 says Ahab, “did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.” That was saying a lot because those before him were bad news. Instead of worshiping the God of Israel Ahab built temples for Baal, a false Canaanite god, as well as for Asherah, a supposed goddess.

One of his terrible moves was in violation of God's command that the king should not marry a foreign woman. He married a Phoenician princess, the infamous Jezebel. Her name is also associated with evil. No one names their daughter Jezebel. She pushed Ahab to establish the worship of idols and false gods as the religion of Israel. She had 850 supposed prophets of Baal and Asherah eating at her table. In other words, they were on the government payroll, supported by the taxpayers. In 1 Kings 18:4 we learn that promoting these false religions wasn't enough for Jezebel. She was also obsessed with stamping out any remnant of the worship of the God of Israel. She wasn't subtle about this. She was having the prophets of the Lord murdered. This lady was bad news.

In chapter 18 the great prophet Elijah was led by God to challenge Ahab to a one time, winner take all, religion national championship. On one team there would be Elijah, the prophet of Yahweh, all alone, and on the other would be Jezebel's 850 government false prophets. They would each ask their supposed God to show up in a visible way and see who proved to be the real thing. They would set up sacrifices on altars and whichever God could send fire to burn up the sacrifices with no human involvement would be the champion. It was a rout. The false gods were a total no-show, for the obvious reason that they don't exist, and the Lord God of Israel showed up in spectacular and undeniable fashion.

It was a undisputed victory, a total blowout. 1 Kings 18:39 says, "When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!'" They then killed all 850 phony prophets of Baal and Asherah. Elijah had just won the religion national championship and swayed the entire nation to turn back to their God in a landslide. He could not have hoped for a better outcome. Now, at last, it seemed Israel would follow their God. He was sure that now there would be a national revival.

Unfortunately things didn't go quite as Elijah expected. We see in verse 2 how Jezebel felt about losing the national championship. She "sent a messenger to Elijah to say, 'May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like one of them,'" referring to her now dead false prophets. She wanted to make sure Elijah shared their fate. She was saying, to quote Inigo Montoya from *The Princess Bride*, "prepare to die." Well that's a pretty unsportsmanlike attitude. Talk about a sore loser. Sheesh. She lost fair and square. She should just take her medicine. But she was having no part of that.

There are some things about Jezebel that we should note. One is the perversity of those who refuse to worship God. Elijah's contest had proven beyond doubt that Baal and Asherah were phonies and Yahweh, the God of Israel, was very much the real deal. Everyone in the nation could see it with their own eyes. But Jezebel *still* rejected God and held onto to her phony god wannabes. Jezebel rejected the truth not because she couldn't believe it, but because she refused to do so. Second, we notice that Jezebel also couldn't bear to even allow the religion of Yahweh to exist. She saw its very existence as a threat that had to be eliminated. Sadly, these realities are still with us. Opponents of Jesus today will continue to reject him even when there is powerful evidence that he is the truth, and they will also consider the very existence of faith in him to be somehow a threat that must be eliminated.

Elijah was shocked when he got that message from Jezebel. He knew that this was no idle threat. She had been on a murderous campaign to rid Israel of all prophets of God, and had been violently succeeding. This turn of events was the last thing Elijah thought would happen. Verse 3 says, "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. He didn't even pause to pack or turn off the lights. He just bolted and ran as fast as he could, and he did not look back. He didn't stop until he came to Beersheba, which was way in the southern part of Judah.

On one hand I can understand why Elijah was so afraid. Jezebel had demonstrated that she had both the will and the ability to have prophets of the Lord assassinated. What would you do if you knew someone that murderous and that powerful said to you, "You're a dead man. It's going to happen by this time tomorrow."

On the other hand, his panicked retreat is disappointing. We know that Elijah was a man of tremendous faith. He showed that in many ways. He had just won a great victory by asking God to rain fire down on a mountain top in Israel and God had done it in spectacular fashion. So we kind of want to say, "Hey, Elijah, what are you worried about? If Jezebel sends some assassins just call down fire from heaven on them and burn them right out. What are you afraid of? Dude, where's your faith?" He didn't have to worry about a sniper picking him off at long range, or one of Jezebel's killers setting on IED near him and taking him out with that. In that day if you wanted to kill someone you had to do it up close and personal. Elijah could see it coming from miles away. If God could defeat hundreds of false prophets with fire from heaven, don't you think he could take out an assassin or two without breaking a sweat?

Furthermore, it seems to me that this message was nothing but an attempt at intimidation by Jezebel. Why would you sent a messenger to tell Elijah you were going to have him killed? If you could send a messenger you could just as well send an assassin. Why telegraph what you were going to do if you could just do it? That suggests to me that Jezebel's threat was something of an empty one. If she could have done it she would have. Perhaps after Elijah's big win over the Baal and Asherah teams his popularity was at an all time high. She could hear the crowds out in the streets chanting, "E-li-jah! E-li-jah!" She knew if she had him killed at that point it could lead to big trouble for her with the people. So she was actually hoping for exactly the reaction she got from Elijah. If I can't kill him, maybe I scare him off. Maybe I can't kill him, but I can sure try to run him out of town. And that's just what she got. He fell for it.

Unfortunately Elijah was as human as you and me. He had great faith, but under these circumstances somehow that faith disappeared for a time. Maybe it was because he was caught off guard. He never saw this coming. He figured his big victory would be the end of his troubles, then he got blindsided by Jezebel's threat. Whatever the case, he panicked and ran. In short, fear won out in Elijah's mind. His fear overcame both his common sense and his faith. He ran away in terror when he had nothing to be afraid of. God was not going to let Jezebel kill him, unless somehow it was his will for Elijah's time on earth to be up, in which case Elijah should have accepted that.

ELIJAH FELT SORRY FOR HIMSELF

When Elijah got to Beersheba he left his servant there and went a "day's journey" out into the boonies outside of town. Let's call it 10 miles for sake of illustration. Walking 10 miles would have been an easy 3 to 4 hour walk at the most. He sat down and prayed. No offense, Elijah, but maybe you should have tried that earlier. But what he prayed wouldn't have helped. "I've had enough, Lord. Take my life." He claims he can't take it anymore. I get that. He's been living under a lot of pressure. For some time he has known that the "queen" of his nation, Jezebel, is determined to kill every prophet of Yahweh in Israel and he was at the top of that list. He's been living with that threat hanging over him. Finally he has decided that he can't take it anymore, so he asks God just to kill him.

That prayer doesn't make sense. If he was so weary that he wanted to die why didn't he just stay back home? All he had to do was hang out at home and Jezebel promised she would give him what he wanted. What that tells me is that Elijah didn't actually want to die. If he really wanted to die he could have just stayed home and let it happen. No, what he really wanted was to complain about how unfair life was. He just wanted to make sure God knew how hard this all had been. He's feeling very sorry for himself. It's been so bad, Lord, I just want to die. I can't deal with this anymore. Oh, poor Elijah. Call the waa-ulance. He's whining.

God sent an angel to help him out. The angel gave him some food and water and told him to rest. After eating and sleeping God told him to get on with his journey. He walked 40 days until he got to Mt. Horeb, which we know as Mt. Sinai. Well that's not significant, is it? He walked 40 days to get there. The number 40 is frequently associated with the wilderness, especially the wilderness of Sinai. And of course Sinai is the place where God revealed himself and established his covenant with his people. This tells us that once again God is going to meet with one of his people and reveal himself in a significant way.

In verse 9 as Elijah is in a cave God speaks to him and asks, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” That’s a really good question. He was supposed to be a prophet. To whom was Elijah going to prophesy while hanging out all by himself in a cave in the middle of nowhere? That’s a bit like being a surfer and living in Kansas.

Elijah’s response was, “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.” Um, would you like a little cheese with that whine, Elijah? Sheesh. Do you get what he’s saying? He’s talking about how hard he worked for God, how he put his life on the line, and what good did it do? Nada. Zip. Zero. Nil. It did no good whatsoever. Israel rejected a relationship with God and started killing his fellow prophets. And now it’s his turn. Thanks for nothing, Lord. He is actually accusing God of not doing his part. Elijah had done his job, but God had not done his. God had let him down. He feels mistreated, by Jezebel, the people of Israel, and by God Himself! He’s saying, “I’m tired of it. I quit.”

Self pity was going to keep Elijah from being of any use whatsoever. That’s characteristic of self pity. It keeps us from being of any use to anyone and encouraging social quitting. When Toby was in high school I coached his high school hockey team his junior and senior years. There was a kid on that team that was a very good hockey player. He wasn’t as good as he thought he was, but he was pretty good. He had the potential to be one of the best, but there were a couple of things holding him back. He was selfish and immature, and those were his biggest problems. Though he couldn’t see it they were the biggest roadblocks to his being terrific. One night we were playing against one of the best teams in the county. We were a big underdog. Most expected that we’d get blown out, and yet well into the game we were leading by one goal when our best player had to leave the game because one of his skates broke. This was a bad blow for us, but we continued to hold our own. We needed that kid to play well, but he was not coming through. As the game went on he got worse and worse. The problem was especially after our best skater went out the other team started keying on him and they began frustrating him. A mature player would have realized that by paying that much attention to him they were giving others on our team opportunities, but he was all about himself. In his frustration he began whining. He whined to referees that they weren’t giving penalties to the other team that he felt they should. He whined to teammates. He started whining to me. I didn’t feel like the refs were doing that bad of a job, but more to the point was a message I continually preached to our team. Bad calls are part of the game. Good teams, and good players, know that and work to overcome them. I told him to control himself, play

his position and play hard. Don't worry about the referees. But he did none of that. He felt sorry for himself and essentially quit. Instead of playing harder he started yelling at the referees, yelling at opposing players and yelling at teammates. I pulled him out to try to refocus him and near tears he started yelling at me. I said, "That's it. You're done. Go sit down." He didn't play another minute and we ended up losing a close, hard fought game. Because he felt sorry for himself he became useless.

We all know what self-pity feels like because we've all wallowed in it at various points. It sort of feels perversely good to wrap ourselves in a cocoon of "poor me." Unfortunately while it seems like the most comforting thing in the world when we are feeling sorry for ourselves to curl up in a ball and suck our thumbs, it actually makes things worse. It deepens the pit we're in and it distorts our view of life. It makes it hard to see life as it really is. It messes up our perspective.

We have a picture of our family from when we were on vacation on the island of Kauai many years ago. Our kids hate this picture. Both of them were in their adolescent years, not their best phase of life. Toby in particular was in the throes of his middle school years, which could be generously described as lamentable for him. Right near the end of that trip we had a moment where in his self-absorbed adolescent state he became incensed over the fact that he wasn't being treated fairly, at least in his mind. I clearly remember this incident. We were in the parking lot of the Hilo Hattie store in the town of Lihue and he had a major meltdown. I can't even tell you the specifics of what he wanted, except I know he felt he should be given money to buy some trinket he wanted. It became a major event because he was being so unjustly treated. He felt sorry for himself. Just to be clear, he was on vacation in Hawaii, paid for by his parents. He was fully fed and clothed, and was treated continually with love and respect by his parents. But he wasn't getting what he wanted, went into self-pity mode, and somehow couldn't see the bigger picture that he was maybe one of the most fortunate kids on the planet. That's how self-pity warps our perspective.

ELIJAH FELT ALONE

Note one more thing about the dark pit that Elijah had climbed into. At the end of verse 10 he said, "I am the only one left." Jezebel was killing the prophets. There was an implied indictment of God in that statement. God wasn't protecting his servants. The people who were loyal to him and serving him were being eliminated and God was doing nothing about it.

That's a bit more of Elijah's petulance coming out. Looking at the world through self pity colored glasses Elijah said all the prophets had been killed except him. He was the only one left. It wasn't true and I suspect he knew that wasn't literally true. He was doing what we all do when we get into the emotional state he was in. We paint the picture considerably blacker than it really is.

We find out that the facts of the matter were quite different. Elijah was not the only prophet left. Even if he were, so what? He had the Lord with him. When he faced off against the prophets of Baal and Asherah they had 850 against him alone. Who won that contest? God won it, using Elijah. Elijah should have remembered that Elijah and God outnumbered 850 men. But in verse 18 God informs Elijah that he is far from alone. God had 7000 men in Israel who were still faithful to him.

Yeah, but 7000 isn't that many out of a whole nation. Well let's think about that for a moment. That's an interesting number, isn't it? I suspect it is slightly symbolic. I don't think God took count and found out he had 7001 people faithful to him in Israel, counting Elijah. The number 7 typically is the number of completeness in the Bible. 7 days of creation, 7 years of the Great Tribulation, to completely forgive is to forgive 70 times 7. So 7000 means a really big number of people that are all that is needed. So no, Elijah, you are not alone. Far from it. God has all the people faithful to him that he needs, and there are a lot of them.

There's something that happens in this story that is easy to miss. Elijah is feeling alone, but did you notice what he did when he got to Beersheba? Verse 3 says he left his servant behind and went on into the wilderness. You could see that as an effort to seek God alone, but I don't think that's what it was. Elijah wasn't really seeking God, he was sucking his thumb and pouting. The obvious question is if he was feeling alone, why would he leave a faithful servant who could support him behind? That just deepened his isolation.

Oddly I've seen this happen with Christians. It is far from universal, but I've seen a number of examples when they hit a rough patch some believers go into a bunker and cut themselves off from people. That is a bad idea. It tends to encourage thumb sucking. What we need is people who can care about us, who will stand with us, pray for us, and encourage us. So don't do that!

APPLICATION

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I am the most miserable man living. If what I feel were distributed to the whole human family, then there would not be one cheerful soul on earth. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die to get better." Yikes. Old

Abe was not a happy camper. Many of us know what that feels like. We might feel as hopeless as Elijah. We want to curl up into the fetal position and suck our thumb. There are some things we need to do when we feel that way.

LISTEN FOR GOD'S WHISPER

This story is a profound one. Elijah is in the place that is known for being the spot where God reveals himself. Sure enough, God meets Elijah there. He tells him in verse 11, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." God was going to reveal himself to Elijah! He tells him to get ready. This is going to be big. Before Elijah can move, sure enough, a huge storm hit. The hurricane force wind howled, thunder boomed and lightning split the sky, the noise was deafening. Rocks were blown apart and tumbled down the mountain. It was power to the nth degree! Recently we had a day of wind and rain that was impressive. At one point I was in our kitchen looking outside. The rain was coming down like there was a shower head over our house, but the wind was the big thing. It was howling. Trees were bending nearly horizontal in the wind and the gusts buffeted the house. We have a good sized tree in a big pot on our patio. As I was watching the wind blew the heavy tree and pot over and it hit another very large pot that was going to be the home of another tree. It shattered the pot. Honestly the power of the thing was kind of unnerving. Imagine that raging storm that Elijah witnessed that day. The whole scene said "Power!" With a capital P.

Elijah was just about to yell out, "Yeah! That's what I'm talking about. That's exactly what we need, Lord." But the verse then says, "But the Lord was not in the wind." Then came an earthquake. Talk about unnerving. We get used to occasional quakes here. It's always a bit disturbing that the one thing you could always count on to be stable, the ground itself, suddenly starts jolting around. You know as well as I that a big one is just plain scary as you start thinking, "How bad is this going to get?" Elijah was thinking, "Yes, Lord, this will show them! It will shake them up, pun intended." But once again the Lord was not in the earthquake.

Then came a roaring fire, but the Lord wasn't in that either. Verse 12 says, "After the fire came a gentle whisper." Do you notice what's missing after that? The passage does not say, "but the Lord was not in the whisper." The Lord was in the whisper. It was when he heard the whisper that Elijah came out of the cave to meet with God and hear what God would say. God told him to go back and do his job. God was still at work and would continue his work.

Elijah wanted God to work in big, spectacular and visible ways, to throw his power around and knock some heads. God had done that in the big win over the false

prophets, but he didn't continue doing it. Elijah wanted him to start a huge revival that would sweep the nation and rid them of Jezebel and Arab for good. Do more dramatic stuff. When it didn't happen, when just the opposite happened, Elijah went into a funk.

God was telling him, "I know you want big, spectacular and impressive. But most of the time that's not how I work. I'm not doing hurricanes, earthquakes and fires to get everyone's attention and wow them. I'm in the gentle whisper." Elijah had to let God work in his strange, sometimes quiet way that looks for all the world like it is totally powerless.

I get Elijah. I want God to show up and blow people away. Who doesn't love an epic, miraculous show? Who doesn't want God to do big and undeniable things? Sadly in the church today people are still making the mistake that Elijah made. They want miracles, spectacular shows, huge crowds, anything big and impressive. But throughout history God has mostly been in the gentle whisper. It is important to remember that in fact God had just given Elijah the big powerful storm. He rained down fire from heaven and in loud, powerful and spectacular fashion defeated the prophets of the idolatrous gods. Yeah that's what I'm talking about! Way to go God! Let's have more of that.

It seems like the big storm had the effect we expect something that dramatic should have. Everybody is admitting God is the clear winner and they're getting rid of those false prophets. But the problem is a month later nothing had changed. Israel was as idolatrous and messed up as ever. The reason God doesn't do more of what Elijah wanted and we want, the big, loud and impressive stuff, is that contrary to popular opinion it usually doesn't bring about lasting change. There is a reason for that, but that's a topic for another day. The point is true change mostly happens through God's quiet whisper, his Spirit working in the hearts of people.

What do you suppose Elijah would have expected had he learned that some day God was actually going to physically enter human history personally! Probably the same kinds of things we would have wanted. Something big, loud and impressive. He would never have expected a baby born to a humble couple of nobodies in a stable. He would not have expected him to end up rejected, executed like the worst of criminals while his opponents taunted him.

Zechariah prophesied during a down time in the history of Israel. After the nation had been ruined by conquering Babylonians many of the Jews were forcibly moved to Babylon where they had to live in exile. After 7 decades they were

allowed to return to their homeland. The first group to go back were led by a guy named Zerubbabel. But they were now a weak, powerless and vulnerable group of people that faced the formidable task of rebuilding a totally devastated nation. They wanted to start by building a temple, but all they had was a discouraging pile of rubble and very few resources. To call it disheartening would be an understatement. But in Zechariah 4:6 we see what God told the prophet, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.” It may look small and unimpressive to humans, even hopeless, but God Almighty is at work, and that's what will win the day. So in verse 10 the Lord says, “Who dares despise the day of small things?”

When we are in the wilderness, feeling sorry for ourselves because God hasn't done something to fix the problem, in fact he's been basically AWOL in the whole thing as far as we can tell, we need to remember that God is in the whisper. God is still working, but he's doing it in quiet, small ways we may not even detect.

One of the things that can really get us down is when we feel like we are pretty much useless. Maybe we hoped for big things in life and we feel like right now all we have is a pile of dust. If that happens to you, remember that God is usually in the small things. That means that you are not in a position to gauge your own worth and effectiveness. We have no idea what small things God might be using in us for his great glory.

God will whisper to you today, this week. If you listen, if you tell him you are here to do whatever he says, he will whisper in his quiet way. It may be a small thing, a quiet thing helping someone in need in a way no one will ever notice, an encouraging comment or phone call to someone, no big thing. But we don't know what God will make of those small things. We do know that he is in the whisper more than the loud bang.

KEEP YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Writer Ray Pritchard talks about a time in his life when he felt like God just wasn't showing up. Everything seemed to be falling apart and no matter what he tried nothing worked. No matter how much he prayed things just went from bad to worse. He started having a pity party, feeling sorry for himself. He began whining about everything wrong. He was just complaining. He was following the example of the great prophet Elijah and sucking his thumb. His wife let this go on for some time. Finally she'd had enough, so she said, “Ray, grow up.” As you can imagine, that wasn't exactly the “poor Ray” response he was hoping for and he was kind of offended by her insensitivity. He let her know this, but she came right back and

said, “Why don’t you stop complaining and start looking around to see how good God has been to us?”

He didn’t really want to hear that, but he knew she was right and that at times he had preached that very message. Reluctantly he agreed to begin looking to see where God might have been whispering in his life. He and his wife set up a game to see how many God sightings they could identify in their lives each day. He said when he started paying attention he began to identify handfuls of them every day. It was a kindness from a friend, a phone call, small blessings of all kinds too numerous to mention. He says, “If you keep your eyes open for God, pretty soon you’ll see him everywhere.”

Pritchard goes on to warn us, “Self pity is the enemy of all spiritual growth.” As long as we are feeling sorry for ourselves we will stay stuck in that black pit, sucking our thumbs.

REMEMBER GOD HAS A FUTURE FOR YOU

God whispered to Elijah that there was a future for him. Jezebel was not going to kill him. God would keep him alive. He was to go anoint Elisha to take his place, and he was to go stand with the thousands who were still faithful to the Lord and continue his ministry.

There is hope for us no matter where we may be in life, no matter how black things may seem right now, because God is with us. He does not give up on us. He does not leave us on the planet to just use up oxygen for a few more days until we die. He has us here for a reason, and he sends us out into this world to be a beacon of his grace and his glory no matter where we are. There is hope for us, because our God is with us.

This year in his third year of med school Toby has faced the sobering reality of being a doctor. If you are an ER doctor every person you see is having a bad day. One patient he encountered was a 23 year old recent college graduate who had been the picture of vibrant health. But out of the blue he was hit with viral meningitis. Normally this is a disease people recover from well, but the infection went into his brain, he went into a coma, and for more than a week his life hung in the balance. It looked like he might not survive. He did pull through, but considerable damage was done and he faced a long road to recovery. The point of that story is that life is very uncertain. There are so many threats that could strike us from out of nowhere and end our lives. The fact that they don't isn't an accident, it isn't because you deserve to live or because you are stronger than other people. It

is because God has a future for you and a reason for you to continue to be alive. He has things for you to do, those things he keeps whispering to you.

There is an old classic movie called *The African Queen* that you may have seen. It takes place in Africa at the outset of World War I. Humphrey Bogart plays Charlie Allnut, a rough cut diamond who owns a small riverboat called the African Queen. Katherine Hepburn plays Rosie, a missionary. The two of them are trying to get away from the Germans who are in the area, and they sail down the river to a lake where there is safety. On the way they face one obstacle after another, overcoming them all. But finally the river has fanned out into a marsh that is little more than mud flats. There are tall reeds all around and they can't move the boat any more. They are stuck, the Germans are approaching and they realize they are at wit's end. After all they went through it just seems like such a sad end, but they admit it's over as they lay down to sleep, expecting to be captured any moment. The camera shows them sleeping on the deck then it pans back and you can see they are only a hundred yards from the end of the mud flat. They couldn't see it because of the reeds. But the camera continues to pull back and you see that upriver a powerful storm is dumping copious amounts of rain, the river is swelling, and you realize that very soon the rising river is going to lift the boat and carry it into the lake and the freedom they sought.

When we are feeling sorry for ourselves we need to pan back, to zoom out. We need to remember that God is at work, so there is always hope. We need to know that God will soon lift our boat and carry it where he wants it to go. We need to listen to his whisper and keep doing what he tells us to do.