

Will You Stay Behind?

2 Kings 2

On this Father's Day, every father among us would echo the words of Proverbs 5:7, **"Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth."**

It is this sentiment that serves as a backdrop for a startling question in the Scriptures. It is the question that Jesus Christ put to the disciples in John 6:67. He asked His twelve disciples, **"Will ye also go away?"**

What would bring on such a question? Consider this context in John 6:63-68:

"⁶³ It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and *they* are life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

⁶⁶ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. ⁶⁷ Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? ⁶⁸ Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ And we believe and are sure that thou art *that* Christ, the Son of the living God."

Who had gone away? In John 6, many of His seventy disciples turned their backs on Jesus. Why had they turned their backs? It was because of the strong, straightforward teaching from Jesus Christ. He contradicted the widespread wisdom of the culture. He did not fulfill their popular expectations, which were based on their widely held beliefs.

The people wanted Him to do more signs and wonders; they especially wanted Him to feed them again. But instead of giving them more bread and fish, Jesus gave them food for their faith; He offered them strength for their souls. Since trusting God is more important than getting tasty treats, Jesus taught them about true faith. He gave them the Word of God. But this is why they turned their backs on Him. And it may be that there are those under the sound of my voice who wish to do the same.

Denying their self-sufficiency, Jesus taught that the Spirit of God quickens; man's fleshly nature is of no profit. How does God quicken (or enliven or revive)? The Word of God, given by the Spirit, leads us to life (v. 63). No man can come to Jesus, unless this new life is given by the work of the Father (vs. 29, 37, 39, 44, and 65). But by embracing the Son of God who was sacrificed for our sins, was buried and rose again, each person is made alive

in Christ. The great need for them (and for us) is to feast on the Bread of Life (vs. 35, 48, 56-58).

Some of His followers (and Judas, one of the twelve) had never placed their faith in Him (vs. 64, 66). So Jesus asked His twelve disciples, **“Will you also go away?”** And the question still comes down to us today. Will you also go away? Will you be one of those who turns his back on the Lord?

Keep that question in mind as we turn over to 2 Kings 2. At one of the lowest points in his life and career, the Lord had given a command to Elijah: to name Elisha as his successor.ⁱ

Elijah insisted that had been faithful, and that people were trying to kill him. Apparently this was true, for the Lord did not contradict him. But Elijah also said that he was the only faithful man left; the Lord replied that He had seven thousand men who had not bowed to Baalⁱⁱ. On this occasion, the Lord instructed Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19:15-21). So Elijah obeyed the Lord and called Elisha as his successor. Elisha is an example of servant-leadership even to us today. Rather than focus on Elijah, he focused on the God of Elijah. In so doing, he helped Elijah finish his course and continue to serve the Lord.ⁱⁱⁱ

2 Kings 2 tells the story of Elijah’s last day on earth. 2 Kings 2:1 begins this way: **“And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.”** Here is something to consider on this Father’s Day. If this were your last day on earth, what would you want to show to the next generation? What would you want to say to them? If you were able to talk to your father and your mother on the last day of their lives, what would you want to say to them? Pay close attention to 2 Kings 2. It gives answers to both generations. In John 6, the question was, “Will you also go away?” In 2 Kings 2, the related question is, “Will you stay behind?” Using the example of Elisha, it’s clear that in recognizing the presence and power of God, we can press on to embrace the promises of God.

The Last Road Trip

In six short verses, we learn about the last road trip that Elijah and Elisha ever took. The Lord had chosen their destinations, sending them to each in succession and what a journey it was. They started at Gilgal and hiked in turn to Bethel, Jericho and the Jordan River. Notice the similarities between verses 2, 4 and 6.

In each case, Elijah offered Elisha the chance to stay behind. In each case, Elisha refused. Let’s find out why the trip was important, and why Elisha refused to stay behind. Here are three lessons about leadership.

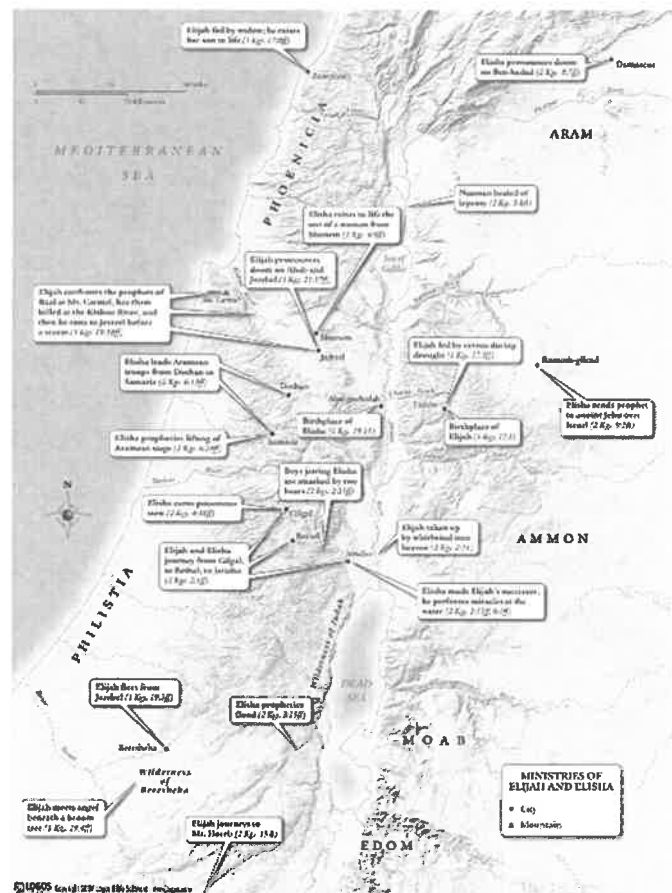
The First Lesson of Leadership: The Presence of God

² And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here [Please stay here], I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel.

The expression, “went down to Bethel” gives us a clue about the location of Gilgal. This was not the Gilgal where Joshua ordered Israel to erect memorial stones, taken from the Jordan River (Joshua 4:15-24). If it were that Gilgal, the record would read “they went up to Bethel” an ascent of about three thousand feet. The Gilgal in this passage is likely modern day Jiljilia, about 4 miles from Bethel.^{iv}

The first part of the trip was to Bethel. According to 2 Kings 2:3, some of the sons of the prophets were gathered in Bethel. They knew it was Elijah’s last day on earth and made sure the Elisha knew it was well. And Elisha assured them that he was fully aware of the situation, and asked them to keep quiet.

Bethel (which means “the house of God”) was named by their forefather, Jacob. In that place, God gave Jacob a dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder to heaven. When Jacob awakened, he declared, **“Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.”** (Genesis 28:16). As you read the story of Jacob, you realize that this was a life-changing moment for him. Recognizing that the Lord is present with each of us can be life-changing as well.



Later in life, Jacob wanted to impress the significance of Bethel upon his children. In Genesis 35:3, Jacob said, **“³ And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.”** As Joseph, the teenage son of Jacob, endured his trials, he must have reflected on his father’s words. “God answered me in the day of my distress and was with me in the way which I went.”

Fathers, if this were your last Father's Day on this earth, how would you want to guide your children? You would want to guide them to remember the presence of God. He answers us in the day of our distress, and is with us wherever we go.

Long after we are gone, our children can still trust in God's presence and His promises. In His Great Commission to His disciples, Jesus reminded them, **"Lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the world."** We are still trusting in the presence of God with us.

According to Revelation 1:12-19, Jesus Christ is in the midst of His churches today. With His eyes as a flame of fire, and His voice like the sound of many waters, He stands in the midst of the golden candlesticks. He is the first and the last, and He holds the keys of death and hell in His hand. Today, we still proclaim the glorious truth of our God, whose name is Immanuel, meaning, "God with us." We want the next generation to know that God is present with us, just as He will be present with you. So today we ask our children, *"Will you listen to the instructions of this passing generation, and lay these lessons to heart?"*

Our time is short, and life is too short to be shallow. We have learned some things by experience, and we would like to pass along the lessons. And keep this question in mind: "What would motivate you to keep pressing on to follow the Lord?" First answer: the presence of the Lord.

The Second Lesson of Leadership: The Power of God

⁴ And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.

In 2 Kings 2:4, Elijah gave Elisha another opportunity to stay behind; and once again Elisha refused. This time, the Lord sent them to Jericho. Of course, the "battle" of Jericho is one of the most well-known episodes in the Old Testament. In Joshua 6, the story of how God delivered Jericho into the hands of the Israelites is amazing.

Next to the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of Jericho is one of the premier displays of God's power in the Old Testament. More of the sons of the prophets were gathered at Jericho. There they repeated the message of the prophets at Bethel; they reminded Elisha that the Lord would take Elijah home that day. The sons of the prophets were really focused on Elijah!^v Once again, Elisha told them that he knew about the situation, and asked them to remain quiet.

On this Father's Day, what do we want the next generation to know? We want them to know the power of God. The power of God was clearly seen in the miraculous defeat of Jericho.

But it is more clearly seen in the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the power of God unto salvation.^{vi} Jesus Christ is the Lord who came to Earth as the Father's Lamb, to take away the sins of the world. He suffered and died alone, but after three days He rose again alive from that dark tomb. Jesus did all this to clothe us in His glorious righteousness. The power of God that raised Christ again from the dead is still with us today.^{vii} This is why the Apostle Paul would write about his longing, in Philippians 3:9-10: **“*And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: ¹⁰That I may know him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*”** Today, I would ask the fathers among us: Do you ever feel like a failure? Are you conscious of how many times you have failed to honor the Lord? Well, here is good news: God is not finished with us yet. Against the dark backdrop of our failures, what if our family could see the sparkling light through you? As you seek to know the Lord better, demonstrating the power of His resurrection, they can see that light.

In the last message, we learned how to pray in perilous times, and the times grow increasingly perilous. Will you teach your children about the Lord's presence? According to 2 Chronicles 16:9, **“*For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose heart *is* perfect toward him.*”** So on this Father's Day, I would like to ask the fathers among us: Will you leave a legacy of showing your children how to appeal to the Lord to demonstrate His power? And for the teens and children among us: Will you learn to lean on the power of God? And keep this question in mind: “What would motivate you to keep pressing on to follow the Lord?” Second answer: the power of the Lord.

The Third Lesson of Leadership: The Promise of God

“⁶ And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.”

On the final leg of their journey, the Lord sent Elijah and Elisha to the Jordan River. Once again, Elijah offered Elisha the chance to stay behind; once again, Elisha decided to press on. As they stood at the Jordan, fifty sons of the prophets watched them from a distance. According to 2 Kings 2:8, Elijah struck the waters with his mantle and the waters parted; then they walked over on dry ground.

When Israel came to the Jordan River under Joshua's leadership, they came to the formal border of the Promised Land.^{viii} When Israel passed over Jordan, Joshua said, "**Hereby shall you know that the Living God is among you . . .**" Joshua went on to recite the promises of God to give them the land. Remember that the Promised Land is about the Promised Lord. Old Testament prophecies about our Lord's birth, life, death and resurrection were all fulfilled in the Promised Land. On the day when the mantle of leadership passed from Elijah to Elisha, God reminded them both of His prevailing promises. And keep this question in mind: "What would motivate you to keep pressing on to follow the Lord?" Third answer: the promises of the Lord.

On this Father's Day, every one of us would like to give these reminders to the younger generation. We would like to testify that God is present, God is powerful, and God keeps His promises. Peter referred to God's promises as "exceedingly great and precious promises"^{ix} by which we are partakers of the divine nature. He promised to save those who come unto God by Jesus Christ. God promised to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by Him. As each new generation mixes its faith with the promises of God, they will find that He is still faithful.

Two Motives that Last

In verses 2, 4, and 6, Elijah asked Elisha if he wanted to stay behind. Elisha responded the same way each time. When he was offered the opportunity to stay behind, he repeated this statement, "**As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.**" This is what kept Elisha moving forward.

It would have been easy for him to be frustrated with Elijah's problems. Trusting the Lord, Elijah had been bold to confront the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). But in 1 Kings 19, we also read about his failures: fleeing from Jezebel, wallowing in self-pity, and assuming that he was the last of the faithful men. His frustration seems evident when he followed God's command to call Elisha. After he called Elisha, Elijah said, "**Go back again: for what have I done to you?**"^x That could have been discouraging. Elijah let his despair influence what he said to Elisha.

But Elisha looked past Elijah's problems to see the Person who was behind the power of the prophet. This is an important principle for all of us. The sons of the prophets were very focused on Elijah – even after the Lord took him to heaven!^{xi} We are in danger of making heroes out of human beings in the same way. But Elisha got it right. We should look to the Lord: the Person who was behind the power of the prophet. Even when Elijah

was alive, Elisha's focus was on the Lord: **"As the LORD lives, and as thy soul lives, I will not leave thee."** Elisha focused on

- The Living God

- The Life of God in the soul of the prophet

These are two motives that will last – long after the older generation has gone to heaven. If we want to keep pressing on – persevering to turn our problems into projects, here is where we should keep our eyes: the living God who gives life to our souls. Elisha even asked for a double portion of Elijah's spiritual power (2 Kings 2:9). This is what the next generation needs for the dark days ahead. When you think this way, you won't stay behind. You will keep pressing on in the presence and power of God to embrace the promises of God.

In a remarkable display, Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind by a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire. But Elijah's mantle fell to the ground as he was taken into the heavens. Elisha took up that mantle and struck the waters of the Jordan crying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" and the waters parted. (2 Kings 2:11-15). And the Holy Spirit who had rested upon Elijah, rested on Elisha.^{xii} Elisha's focus was not on Elijah, but on the God of Elijah. And he kept pressing on knowing that God was present with him.

Back in John 6, we can see echoes of our text today in 2 Kings 2. Peter replied to Jesus, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."** On this Father's Day, let's keep our eyes on the Living God. He is the Person who is behind the power of faithful parents and faithful preachers. May God grant the new generation the grace to ask Elisha's question (2 Kings 2:14): **"Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"**

Discussion questions to consider with your family on this Father's Day:

How have you sensed the presence of God in your life?

How have you been assured that God is alive and at work in your life?

How have you seen the power of God in your life?

Which promises of God have you seen the Lord fulfill in your Christian experience?

What stories would you like to pass along to the next generation to help them keep going on for the Lord?

How would you like to express your appreciation to the generations that have gone on before you?

Pastor Gordon Dickson, Calvary Baptist Church, Findlay, Ohio

ⁱ Elijah's conversation with the Lord occurred on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8) which is another name for Mount Sinai (where God gave Moses the Law, including the Ten Commandments).

ⁱⁱ The unnamed prophets in 1 Kings 20 were undoubtedly among these seven thousand, as was Micaiah (1 Kings 22:8-28). 2 Kings 2 describes many more prophets who had not bowed the knee.

ⁱⁱⁱ As evidenced by Elijah's confrontation of Ahab (1 Kings 21:17-29), his confrontation of Ahaziah's servants (2 Kings 1:1-4), the confrontation with the captains sent by Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:9-15) when Elijah called down fire from heaven.

^{iv} See Smith's Bible Dictionary cited in Bible History "Gilgal" accessed at <https://www.bible-history.com/geography/ancient-israel/ot/gilgal.html>

^v Even after it was clear that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, fifty of the prophets wanted to send out an expedition to find Elijah! See 2 Kings 2:15-18. While Elisha focused on the Lord, the prophets focused on Elijah. May God deliver us from this kind of human hero worship.

^{vi} Romans 1:16-17

^{vii} See Philippians 3:21

^{viii} Joshua 3

^{ix} 2 Peter 1:3-4

^x 1 Kings 19:20

^{xi} 2 Kings 2:16-18

^{xii} This brings to mind Paul's statements about the thorn in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (Literally, that the power of Christ may [*episkenose*] "pitch His tent upon me.")