

## Food for Thought—The Stalking Lion and Elijah's Despair



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The scripture tells us that our enemy is like a lion seeking and stalking prey to devour. He doesn't want to just hinder us a little; he wants to destroy us. Lions tend to avoid large, difficult prey like elephants or giraffes; they prefer smaller, weaker prey. Lions also lurk in tall grasses or other cover in order to stay hidden and undetected by their prey until they are very close, within striking range. That is what the enemy of our souls is like as well. He hunts us cleverly and stealthily within and through our thought lives. He speaks lies to us that we often believe, and he is also good at disguising those lies as our own thoughts. Either way—whether an untrue thought starts directly from our own stupidity and selfishness or whether it starts out as Satan impersonating our own inner voice—a stream of untrue ideas will flow through our thoughts on any given day. Satan uses them to stealthily position himself for attack. Untrue thoughts are like the tall grasses and brush he uses to get close to us. Therefore, we should remember this warning: **Don't believe everything you think.** Many of the thoughts that pass through our head are just not true and can prove disastrous sooner or later.

You may remember that Elijah, after the incredible, miraculous triumph in the contest against the priests of Baal, Jezebel sends him a message saying she is going to kill him. After what he's just experienced, it would make sense for him to say, "Who cares! I'm not too worried about her! My God can send fire from heaven if need be." But that is not his response. Despite the miracle that just took place in the eyes of a zillion people, Elijah goes into a spiral of despair, and he crashes. When God eventually asks him what's going on, Elijah says he is the only one left who is a follower of God, that he is completely alone, and that Jezebel is going to kill him. God says, no, you aren't the last one, the only one; there are 7,000 people, God says, in the northern kingdom who have not bowed the knee to Baal (and this doesn't even count all the ones in Judah and elsewhere). Because Elijah felt alone, he believed that he was alone. Our emotions often make us think a thought is true when it is way off the mark in terms of accuracy. Elijah's thought error is a really good reminder of something important; **we can go into despair based on zero truth.** Even if Elijah had been the only God-follower on the planet, it would not have been a good reason for despair, but what he was thinking—that he was the only one left following God--wasn't even remotely true. The thought that sent him into despair was not even correct.

Elijah's story also is a good reminder that feeling alone is almost never a good thing; it was very much a part of Elijah's collapse. The enemy likes to get us to feel alone even if we are not (and likes to get us to become alone, if he can). When we check our thought life, if we notice that we're having quite a few thoughts telling us we're alone, we should be suspicious of those thoughts. Very often we are not alone, and we certainly don't have to stay that way if we are. If the feelings of isolation make us feel like not even trying to find or renew friendships or fellowship, then those thoughts are definitely the work of the enemy, and we should respond accordingly. The lies of Satan—whether lies of condemnation or lies convincing us we're alone—tend to bring about paralysis. Miserable paralysis is a like a calling card of our enemy's handiwork. Conviction from God leads to action in a good direction. Lies from Satan lead to paralysis.

Why did Elijah despair and fear? He'd seen many miracles, not just the fire from heaven. He'd seen the prophesied drought of 3 years, he'd been brought food by ravens (that's not normal), he'd seen a widow's oil and flour be daily miraculously multiplied, and he'd seen God bring the widow's son back to life. So, what happened to Elijah to bring him suddenly so low? I am guessing that he just simply had an unmet expectation. He probably expected Jezebel to repent once she heard about the fire from heaven. When she did just the opposite, it seems to have knocked the wind out of Elijah's sails. But God hadn't told Elijah she would repent or resign. Elijah just appears to have expected that and to have been crushed when that didn't happen. We too often mistake our expectations for God's promises. Thoughts that count on our expectations being met are ones that need to be noted, checked, and set aside.

Elijah also used extreme words; he thought nobody was serving God except for him. Thoughts containing words like "nobody" or "everyone" or "always" or "never" tend to be inaccurate. Satan likes to use them. He likes us to think things like "she never understands anything!" or "I always mess things up" or "I will never be happy." Such thoughts are almost always untrue. Let's imagine that I just thought to myself, "Everyone at work is terrible!" (To be clear, I have not thought this.) Is "everyone" at work terrible? Well, it might be true that several are or that many are, but it is extremely unlikely indeed that all of them are. Might there not be one person who is a kind person or who tries to do what's right? There might even be two...or three...maybe a great many... We think such silly thoughts sometimes. I haven't even *met* everyone at my workplace, much less been privy to their deepest thoughts and motives. Laughing at how silly our thoughts can be is a great way to take the power out of them and thwart what Satan wanted to do with them.

And if we have a thought and wonder whether it's a wrong one or a right one, we can apply Jesus's test: does the thought produce good fruit or bad fruit? Elijah's thought ("I'm the only one!") bore bad fruit (he despaired and ran away). When we notice thoughts that bear good fruit, on the other hand, they are probably the true thoughts, and we need to hang onto them with both hands and remind ourselves of them often and speak them to others.      --Sally