

The Trap of Self-Pity

Their father Jacob said to them, “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!” **–Genesis 42:36**

Self-pity is feeling sorry for yourself. You feel that you are the object of unfair treatment, that you have had to carry a load that few, if any, understand or appreciate. You perhaps feel you were unlucky with having the parents you had, the environment you grew up in, the education you received. You may have been abused by an authority figure, lied about, rejected, and discriminated against. Whenever you get a chance to excel, something happens to derail what had possibilities. The future looks bleak, life is passing you by, and there is little to live for.

Speaking to none other than God, Elijah said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. ... I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too” (1 Kings 19:14). First of all, Elijah was not the only prophet left and should have known better. Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hid them in a cave—and Elijah knew that (1 Kings 18:1-15). There were a good number of prophets around. But owing to persecution he was feeling sorry for himself. He took himself too seriously.

Once before Elijah had stated publicly that he was the only prophet left and uttered thoughtless words before hundreds of the prophets of Baal. It shows he had completely dismissed those one hundred prophets that Obadiah preserved. He thought he was a cut above them, that he was the only true prophet.

God is so patient with us when we utter foolish comments like that. Had God required sinless perfection before Elijah could be used, God would have interrupted the proceedings at Mount

Carmel at once—and called the whole thing off. God could have thundered, “No, you are quite wrong”—and stopped the whole thing. But He let Elijah continue.

It was some time later that God said, as it were, “Oh, by the way, Elijah, you might like to know that I have reserved seven thousand who have not bowed down to Baal.” (See 1 Kings 19:18.) God patiently waited for the right time to deal with Elijah. So too with us.

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