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Faithfulness / 1 Kings 18:1–15

As one reads the account of the kings of Israel, a recurring pattern emerges. Some kings sought the Lord, while others deliberately turned away from Him and led the people further into rebellion. Few illustrate this more clearly than King Ahab. He married Jezebel, embraced the worship of Baal, and built a temple and altar for Baal in Samaria ([1 Kings 16:29–32](#)). Scripture tells us that Ahab “did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him” ([1 Kings 16:33](#)). It was into this spiritual darkness that Elijah appeared and announced that there would be neither dew nor rain except at his word ([1 Kings 17:1](#)). Meanwhile, Jezebel was actively killing off the prophets of the LORD ([1 Kings 18:4](#)). These were dark and dangerous days to be a faithful follower of God in Israel. How difficult must it have been to remain faithful during the reign of a king like Ahab? We too live in a fallen world, a creation which Paul says “has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth” ([Romans 8:22](#)). We live in a pluralistic society where absolute truth is increasingly rejected and morality is often determined by the individual. In many ways, it resembles the description at the end of Judges: “everyone did as they saw fit” ([Judges 21:25](#)). And while our culture generally allows people to believe as they choose, it can be increasingly difficult to proclaim the exclusive truth of the gospel—that there is one God, that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father, and that God ultimately determines what is true and right ([John 14:6](#); [Acts 4:12](#)).

But Obadiah's world was far more dangerous than ours. Ahab was not simply a neighbour who believed differently; he was the king, and Jezebel was the queen. Together they used the influence of the throne to promote Baal worship among God's covenant people, while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD ([1 Kings 18:4](#)). Yet even in that darkness, God still had those who would

not bow the knee to Baal ([1 Kings 19:18](#)). So place yourself in their world for a moment. What would you have done? Would you have bowed to Baal because it was safer, or would you have remained distinct, determined that whatever the cost, you would “worship the LORD your God and serve him only” ([Deuteronomy 6:13](#))?

[First Kings 18](#) introduces us to a man who had to answer that question with his life. His name was Obadiah. And what makes his story remarkable is where we find him. He wasn't hiding in a cave with the prophets or living somewhere beyond Ahab's influence. Obadiah was the man Ahab trusted to run his own household ([1 Kings 18:3](#)). Yet right there, in the household of one of Israel's most wicked kings, Scripture tells us that “Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD” ([1 Kings 18:3](#)). Ahab may have been Obadiah's earthly master, but the LORD was the Master of his heart. And as we follow Obadiah through this passage, we are going to discover what it means to remain faithful to God in an unfaithful world. But before we look more closely at Obadiah, notice how the chapter begins: ‘The word of the LORD came to Elijah’ ([1 Kings 18:1](#)). In a nation that had stopped listening to God, God's servant was still listening. And that brings us to our first lesson: faithfulness begins by listening to God.

Faithfulness Begins by Listening to God

1 Kings 18:1-2 NIV

After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: “Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.” So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.

Now the famine was severe in Samaria,

For Elijah to present himself before Ahab required tremendous faith and courage. For three long years there had been neither rain nor dew upon the

land, and now the famine was severe. Ahab had been searching for Elijah, while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD [1]. The drought itself also carried theological significance. Baal was worshiped as a storm god who supposedly brought rain and fertility, yet for three years the heavens remained closed. The drought demonstrated that Baal was powerless and that the LORD alone ruled over the rain—a confrontation that would soon reach its climax on Mount Carmel [2]. But notice the simplicity of Elijah's response. God says, “Go and present yourself to Ahab,” and the very next sentence tells us, “So Elijah went” ([1 Kings 18:1-2](#)). Elijah understood the danger. He knew Ahab had been searching for him and that appearing before the king could cost him his life. Yet when God spoke, Elijah listened, and because Elijah listened, Elijah obeyed. That is where faithfulness begins. Faithfulness means hearing what God has said and ordering our lives accordingly.

Biblical faith is therefore far more than simply believing that God exists. James reminds us that even the demons believe in God “and shudder” ([James 2:19](#)). We are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by our works ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)), but saving faith begins to change the way we live. Paul therefore tells believers to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” ([Philippians 1:27](#)). So how do we remain sensitive to what God has said in a world filled with competing voices? We stay close to Him. We delight in His Word and meditate upon it “day and night” ([Psalm 1:1-2](#)). We “pray continually” ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)). And when God's Word makes His will clear, we don't merely listen—we “do what it says” ([James 1:22](#)). Elijah did not obey because the road ahead was safe. He obeyed because the God who told him to go was worthy of his trust. So perhaps we should ask ourselves: How often has God already made His will clear through His Word, but instead of obeying, we have chosen the safer or more comfortable path? Faithfulness begins with listening—but genuine listening leads to obedience.

Faithfulness Can Flourish in an Unfaithful Place

1 Kings 18:3 NIV

and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, his palace administrator. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD.

The passage now introduces us to a man named Obadiah. Have you ever worked for someone whose beliefs and values were completely different from your own? Imagine working for Ahab! Obadiah was Ahab's palace administrator, a position of tremendous responsibility and influence in the ancient Near East [3]. He would have overseen the affairs of the royal household, managed its resources and staff, and carried out important administrative responsibilities on behalf of the king [4]. Ahab obviously trusted him. Yet there could hardly have been a greater contrast between these two men. Ahab had turned away from the LORD and promoted the worship of Baal, while Scripture tells us that “Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD” ([1 Kings 18:3](#)). He served an ungodly king without allowing that king to determine whom he would worship. When loyalty to Ahab conflicted with loyalty to God, Obadiah's highest allegiance belonged to the LORD. As the apostles would later declare, “We must obey God rather than human beings!” ([Acts 5:29](#)).

Obadiah reminds us that our environment does not have to determine our devotion. Joseph discovered that in Egypt. When tempted by Potiphar's wife, he answered, “How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” ([Genesis 39:9](#)). Daniel discovered it in Babylon when he “resolved not to defile himself” ([Daniel 1:8](#)). Esther remained faithful in Persia. And Obadiah remained devoted to the LORD while serving in the palace of Ahab. Different people, different places, different circumstances—but the same God and the same calling to faithfulness.

Jesus never intended for His followers simply to withdraw from an unbelieving world. Before going to the cross, He prayed, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one”

([John 17:15](#)). We are called to live among those who do not know Christ while remaining distinctly His. Jesus tells us to let our light shine before others so that they may see our good deeds and “glorify your Father in heaven” ([Matthew 5:16](#)). Paul similarly says that we are to “shine among them like stars in the sky” as we hold firmly to the word of life ([Philippians 2:15–16](#)).

Wherever God has placed us—our workplace, our family, our neighbourhood, our school, or our community—He calls us not to conform to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds ([Romans 12:2](#)). Living distinctly for Christ may sometimes bring opposition, but what a privilege it is to live in such a way that others can see something of Christ in us. The darkness around Obadiah did not extinguish his devotion; it made his faithfulness stand out all the more. So we should ask ourselves: Does the way I live point others toward my Father in heaven? Do the people around me know that I belong to Christ—or would they be surprised to discover that I am a Christian?

Faithfulness Shows Itself in Costly Action

1 Kings 18:4 NIV

While Jezebel was killing off the LORD’s prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.

Living faithfully for the Lord will sometimes require us to risk something for the kingdom of God. Obadiah did more than privately believe in the LORD—his faith moved him to action. While Jezebel was killing the LORD’s prophets, Obadiah took one hundred of them, hid them in two caves, and supplied them with food and water. Think about the risk involved. If Jezebel had discovered that the administrator of Ahab’s own palace was secretly protecting the very prophets she was trying to kill, Obadiah could easily have shared their fate. The

significance lies in the tension between his position and his convictions. Like Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah, Obadiah occupied a position of trust within the court of an ungodly ruler, but his situation was especially dangerous because his king's queen was actively murdering the true prophets of God [5]. When loyalty to the palace collided with loyalty to the LORD, Obadiah chose the LORD.

That is what genuine faith does. Faithfulness is more than what we say we believe; eventually it shows itself in how we live. James asks, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?" ([James 2:14](#)). Obadiah could have remained silent, protected his position, and convinced himself that there was nothing he could do. Instead, his devotion to God became visible in costly obedience. Jesus made it clear that following Him would sometimes cost us something. He said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" ([Matthew 16:24](#)). Taking up our cross means that Christ, rather than self, becomes the controlling priority of our lives. It means being willing to surrender our comfort, reputation, possessions, opportunities, and even our safety when faithfulness to Christ requires it [6]. Self-denial means renouncing self as the organizing principle of life and placing God and His will at the centre [7]. Bearing the cross therefore means maintaining our loyalty to Christ even when that loyalty carries a cost [8].

Most of us will probably never be asked to hide one hundred prophets from a murderous queen. But every day we face smaller decisions in which we must choose between what is comfortable and what is faithful. Perhaps it means standing for what Scripture teaches when others disagree, helping someone when it costs us time or money, refusing to compromise our integrity, or simply doing what God has clearly commanded when obedience is difficult. And whatever the earthly consequences, faithfulness to Christ is never wasted. Scripture assures us that our "labor in the Lord is not in vain" ([1 Corinthians 15:58](#)). Obadiah reminds us that genuine faith does not merely believe—it acts, even when obedience comes with a cost.

Faithfulness Means Serving God Even When Doing Ordinary Work

1 Kings 18:5–6 NIV

Ahab had said to Obadiah, “Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals.” So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.

The famine had become so severe that Ahab was forced to take desperate measures. The king summoned Obadiah, not to oversee some grand ceremony or conduct the affairs of the palace, but to search the springs and valleys for enough grass to keep the horses and mules alive. The situation was apparently so desperate that Ahab himself joined the search rather than simply delegating it to others [9]. The preservation of these animals would have been important to the king, both economically and to the functioning of the kingdom [10]. So Ahab divided the territory between himself and Obadiah, demonstrating just how much responsibility and trust he placed in his palace administrator [11]. There is something easily overlooked here. Obadiah was a devout servant of the LORD, but most of his days were probably not spent hiding prophets in caves. Most were spent doing his job—managing responsibilities, following instructions, solving problems, and on this particular day, looking for grass. Yet those ordinary responsibilities were not separate from his faithfulness to God. He could serve an ungodly king diligently without sharing that king's ungodliness.

That reminds us that faithfulness to God is not confined to what we do on Sunday morning. Scripture tells us, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord” ([Colossians 3:23](#)). Whether we are preparing a sermon, raising a family, working in an office, repairing equipment, balancing the books, cleaning a building, or helping someone who needs us, our work can become an expression of our service to God. That means showing up faithfully, working honestly, treating people properly, and carrying out even ordinary

responsibilities with integrity [12]. In doing so, we follow the example of Christ, who came “not to be served, but to serve” ([Mark 10:45](#)) [14]. We sometimes imagine that serving God must involve doing something extraordinary. But much of the Christian life consists of ordinary faithfulness offered to an extraordinary God. Obadiah wasn't preaching a sermon, confronting Baal, or hiding prophets in caves. On this particular day, he was simply doing the work he had been given to do—and that mattered. Faithfulness to God is not measured only by the extraordinary moments of our lives, but also by how faithfully we serve Him in the ordinary ones. Whatever God has placed before you today, do it faithfully, because “whatever you do,” you can do it as service to the Lord ([Colossians 3:23](#)).

God Often Meets Us in the Middle of the Ordinary

1 Kings 18:7–8 NIV

As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, “Is it really you, my lord Elijah?”

“Yes,” he replied. “Go tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’ ”

But sometimes, while we are faithfully doing the ordinary, God places something unexpected in our path. That is exactly what happened to Obadiah. This is a crucial moment in the story. Obadiah had simply been carrying out the ordinary responsibility Ahab had given him. But verse 7 says, “As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him” ([1 Kings 18:7](#)). Suddenly, an ordinary workday became an unexpected opportunity to serve the purposes of God. Think about that. Obadiah wasn't at a worship service. He wasn't hiding in a cave praying with the prophets. He was walking through the countryside looking for grass. Yet right there, in the middle of his ordinary day, God brought Elijah across his path. Ahab had searched throughout the surrounding nations for Elijah ([1 Kings 18:10](#)), and now the prophet suddenly stood before Obadiah. Elijah then gave

him an assignment: “Go tell your master, ‘Elijah is here’” ([1 Kings 18:8](#)). And there is a wonderful reminder here for us: we never know when an ordinary day may become a kingdom opportunity. Much of the Christian life is lived not inside the church building, but in our workplaces, homes, neighbourhoods and communities. Those are not merely places where we do our jobs and live our lives; they are also places where God may give us opportunities to represent Christ.

We are therefore called to live as Christ's ambassadors wherever God has placed us, allowing both our words and our lives to point people toward Him. Scripture urges us, “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near” ([Isaiah 55:6](#)). We never know when God may use an ordinary conversation, an ordinary act of kindness, or an ordinary day at work to accomplish something for His kingdom. Obadiah went out that morning looking for grass—and encountered the prophet of God. He was one of Ahab's most trusted officials, yet when Elijah appeared, Obadiah bowed before God's messenger. He served an earthly king, but his heart belonged to the King of kings.

Faithfulness Does Not Mean the Absence of Fear

1 Kings 18:8–14 NIV

“Yes,” he replied. “Go tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’ ”

“What have I done wrong,” asked Obadiah, “that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death? As surely as the LORD your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you. But now you tell me to go to my master and say, ‘Elijah is here.’ I don’t know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn’t find you, he will kill me. Yet I your

servant have worshiped the LORD since my youth. Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD? I hid a hundred of the LORD's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water. And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!"

Obadiah had already demonstrated remarkable courage. While Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD, he had risked everything to hide one hundred of them ([1 Kings 18:4](#)). Yet when Elijah told him, "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here,'" this courageous man was afraid. And we can understand why. Ahab had searched throughout the surrounding nations for Elijah. Obadiah feared that he would tell Ahab that Elijah had been found, only to return and discover that the Spirit of the LORD had carried Elijah somewhere else. Ahab would assume he had deceived him, and Obadiah was convinced of the consequence: "He will kill me!" ([1 Kings 18:14](#)).

Notice what Scripture allows us to see: Obadiah was a faithful man—and Obadiah was a frightened man. Those two things are not necessarily contradictions. Faithfulness does not mean that we never experience fear. Faithfulness means that fear does not have the final word. Paul told Timothy, "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline" ([2 Timothy 1:7](#)). There will be valleys where the danger is real and the outcome uncertain. Faith doesn't require us to pretend otherwise. Instead, we bring our fears to God in prayer, trusting that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" ([Romans 8:28](#)). And as we pray, God promises that His peace, "which transcends all understanding," will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus ([Philippians 4:6–7](#)). That is why [Proverbs 3:5](#) tells us, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." Faith doesn't always give us certainty about the outcome. Faith gives us confidence in the God who holds the outcome. So what are you afraid of today? Have you brought that fear to God—and are you willing to trust Him enough to take the next step of obedience?

Faithfulness Is Rooted in God's Word

1 Kings 18:15 NIV

Elijah said, "As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today."

Notice where Elijah places his confidence: not in his circumstances, not in Obadiah, and ultimately not even in himself. He says, "As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve." Elijah could stand before Ahab because he knew that before he ever stood before an earthly king, he stood before the living God. And on the strength of Elijah's word, the frightened Obadiah went. Verse 16 simply tells us, "So Obadiah went." He didn't know what would happen on Mount Carmel. He didn't know that fire would fall from heaven or that rain would soon return. He simply knew what he had been told—and he obeyed. And perhaps that is where this entire passage brings us. Faithfulness is ultimately rooted in confidence that God is faithful and His Word can be trusted. Scripture tells us, "Not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled" ([Joshua 21:45](#)). God "does not lie or change his mind" ([Numbers 23:19](#)), and His Word "stands firm in the heavens" ([Psalm 119:89](#)). We will not always know what lies beyond the next step of obedience, but we can always know the character of the One who has called us to take it.

The chapter began with God saying to Elijah, "Go," and Scripture tells us, "So Elijah went" ([1 Kings 18:1-2](#)). Now Elijah tells Obadiah to go, and despite his fear, "So Obadiah went" ([1 Kings 18:16](#)). Two men, different circumstances, but the same response of faithfulness. And that leaves the question with us. Where has God placed you? What has God already made clear in His Word? And will you faithfully obey Him there? The world around us may be unfaithful, the cost may sometimes be high, and we may occasionally be afraid—but the God who calls us to faithfulness is Himself always faithful.

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- [2] Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, trans. John Bowden, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 152–153.
- [3] John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016).
- [4] Tony Evans, “A Lesson about Integrity,” in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 2015).
- [5] Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 369.
- [6] R. Allan Killen, “Cross,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea (Moody Press, 1975).
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- [9] James E. Smith, *The Books of History*, Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 504.

[10] Douglas Redford et al., “Prophet of Courage,” in *The KJV Standard Lesson Commentary, 2020–2021*, ed. Ronald L. Nickelson, Jane Ann Kenney, and Margaret K. Williams (Colorado Springs, CO: Standard Publishing, 2021), 68:259.

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[12] Daniel M. Doriani, *Work That Makes a Difference* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021), 70.

[13] Bruce Riley Ashford, *Every Square Inch: An Introduction to Cultural Engagement for Christians* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 41–42.

[14] David John Atkinson, *Pastoral Ethics* (London: Lynx Communications, 1994), 107.