

Being Thankful for *Our* Ravens

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17% of church goers in South Florida say they have seen a decline in their spiritual life during the COVID pandemic. Many are experiencing mental health concerns ranging from fear, anxiety, or anger to nightmares, sadness, or numbness. Parents sometimes feel bombarded, trying to keep up with their children's complex needs. It is during challenging seasons like this we need to revitalize *every* area of life. Perhaps understanding Elijah's gift of "ravens" can help.



Priscilla Shirer's Bible study, *Elijah*, helped me see how disgusting it would be to be fed by ravens. In Leviticus 11:13-16, God told the Israelites to "abhor" these and other unclean birds. Creatures that dined on dead carcasses were Elijah's twice-daily food delivery service. *So he went and did according to the word of the LORD. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.* (1 Kings 17:5-7, ESV).

What is your desert? God sent Elijah to a place that didn't make sense and provided for his needs in an unpleasant way. **What or who are your ravens?** Are you allowing God to provide for you where you are, or are you demanding something different?

Later, Elijah learned King Ahab had conducted a global manhunt, determined to track down and kill "the troubler of Israel." What seemed like a desert detour was designed by God to protect Elijah from an enraged king and provide for his spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional needs.

When we can't see how God is protecting us, we need to remember He promises to do exactly that.

Like Elijah, we can benefit from being in a place where we're trained to rely on God (and sometimes it takes having nowhere else to go!), instead of on people, places, or things. When we believe God is our sustainer, we'll release our fears to Him, trusting Him for His perfect provision (even if it's delivered in the beak of a raven!).

James 5:17 says *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours [with the same physical, mental, and spiritual limitations and shortcomings]. Like Elijah, we can steadfastly trust God regardless of circumstances, concerns, or fears.* We can neutralize terror with gratitude, talk back to fear with faith—being sure our gratitude is directed *to* God and our faith is *in* God, choosing to be biblical, not "spiritual," when circumstances don't make sense!

My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God. God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us (Ephesians 3:14-20, MSG).