



THE 56TH GENERAL COUNCIL

SOAR

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED LIFE

STAY HERE?

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GENERAL COUNCIL 2015

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2 KINGS 2:1-25

Tonight I invite you on a walk with Elijah and Elisha from the hills north of Jerusalem down to east of the Jordan River, toward Mount Nebo. We start very early in the morning because the walk downhill from 2,700 feet above sea level to 800 feet below sea level is going to take all day. It's a twenty-five mile or more walk.

The walk is all about the transfer of ministry from one generation to another. Will there be a successful handoff? Will the older generation give the younger one a chance to succeed and will the younger generation want what the older generation had?

That's really where we are in this crucial moment of our Fellowship. The walk with

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Elijah and Elisha has a lot to teach us about generational transfer of spiritual authority and power. What happened on that last day of Elijah's walk shapes the next nearly six decades of Elisha's ministry—a ministry that will endure through the reigns of three Israelite kings: Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz and end at the start of the reign of the fourth king, Jehoash. What happened that day even follows Elisha to his grave. Unlike Elijah, Elisha died of sickness and was buried. But, one day a dead man was thrown into Elisha's grave and when his corpse touched Elisha's bones, the dead man came to life. Even in death, Elisha had influence on others! Isn't that what everyone wants—that something of us will impact those who follow?

I started by inviting you to a walk with Elijah and Elisha, but we first need to set the stage for that. We need to go on a flashback to two places.

First, let's find Elijah holed up in a cave at Horeb way down in the Sinai, depressed and fearing for his life. At the very nadir of his ministry, God stirred him out of his depression by gently whispering to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

That's a good question to ask an older generation who has valiantly worked for the Lord and now, in reviewing their own ministry, is just like Elijah—depressed and certain that the work of the Lord ends on their watch. That's why Elijah answered by telling God how bad things were, that he was the only prophet left and people were trying to kill him.

If you had faced the wrath of Jezebel and Ahab, you might be depressed as well. In fact, as you look at the increasing worldliness and anti-Christ culture in which we live, you can begin to think

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like Elijah. “They won, we lost. When our generation is gone, everything will go to pot. I won’t be around much longer and after me there’s nothing.”

It’s a good thing the Lord communicated to Elijah by whispering with that “still small voice” because the Lord had every reason to be angry with him for his lack of faith, for failing to believe that just as the Lord had a plan for one generation, so He has a plan for the next one. In other words, the Pentecostal Movement is not coming to an end on our watch no matter what doomsayers in the spirit of Elijah might say. How can we be so sure? Because we believe the Word of God that says, “In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”

At Horeb down in the Sinai, God told Elijah to get up and get going; that he is not only to anoint a new king, but also

he is to anoint a prophet to succeed him.

The second flashback is this: Elijah had to walk about two hundred miles north to the farm of Shaphat in the fertile Jordan Valley just a few miles south of Beth Shean. The farm's name in Hebrew is "dancing meadow." What a change of scenery from the harsh environs of the cave in Horeb! A few weeks earlier Elijah had subsisted on a cake of bread and a jar of water supplied by an angel—now, he's in a dancing meadow farm! What an encouragement to an older Pentecostal generation that God's final position for you is not in a cave with meager supplies, but in a place where God has the next generation in His dancing meadow.

It's a rather wealthy farm. We know that because the farmer has twelve yoke of oxen, the John Deeres of antiquity. Elijah is only interested in the person

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plowing with the twelfth pair of oxen. He goes up to an already balding young man by the name of Elisha and throws his cloak around him—a prophetic symbol of calling.

In the Pentecostal Movement, we sometimes have had too narrow a view of calling to gospel ministry. We focus most on the kind of call that has supernatural bells, lights, and whistles like that experienced by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, or the apostle Paul.

But, Elisha received his call by the action of Elijah, just as Timothy received his call by the selection of Paul. It was an invitation that resonated in both their hearts. Would that the older generation would always be so sensitive to the voice of the Lord that we recognize the potential in younger people and call them forth in full-time service to the Lord. As pastors and leaders, we must always

be on the lookout for young people we can call out for leadership and service to the Lord. What if thousands of our churches identified each year one young person who shows outstanding promise of a lifetime of service to Christ and His kingdom, and we took offerings and provided scholarships so that young person could go to one of our Assemblies of God colleges or universities? Four years later they would emerge debt free and ready to serve in the harvest fields of this world! We should be helping our young people lay strong foundations that can bear the weight of responsibility the Lord seeks to place on their shoulders.

As passionately as I believe in scholarship investment in young men and women, let me say there is no substitute for the life mentoring that must happen between generations both in the home and in the church. I want to challenge parents, pastors, staff members,

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volunteer children and youth workers to influence the next generation by more than just an occasional devotion, sermon, lecture, or church program. Does your personal schedule include significant and strategic time when you are sharing life with a young person? I love this poem by Edgar A. Guest:

Sermons We See

I'd rather see a sermon
 than hear one any day,
I'd rather one should walk with me
 than merely show the way.
The eye's a better pupil
 and more willing than the ear;
Fine counsel is confusing,
 but example's always clear;
And the best of all the preachers
 are the men who live their creeds,
For to see the good in actions
 is what everybody needs.
I can soon learn how to do it
 if you'll let me see it done.

I can watch your hands in action,
 but your tongue too fast may run.
And the lectures you deliver
 may be very wise and true;
But I'd rather get my lesson
 by observing what you do.
For I may understand you
 and the high advice you give,
But there's no misunderstanding
 how you act and how you live.¹

Let me say one more word about this. Our legal counsel, Richard Hammar, is one of the smartest persons I've ever met. He's a Harvard graduate, a published author and recognized national authority on the church and law, an astronomer, and a diesel mechanic. But, he also has taught a fifth-grade Sunday School class for twenty-nine years. Each class ends by

¹Edgar A. Guest, "Sermons We See" in *The Light of Faith* (Chicago: The Reilly & Lee Co., 1926).

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him saying directly to each child, “You are awesome, and you are going to change the world.”

A couple of years ago Rich became aware of the incident that turned Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, away from Christ and the church. Jobs attended a Lutheran church with his parents. At age thirteen he asked his pastor, “If I raise my finger, will God know which one I am going to raise even before I do it?” The pastor answered, “God knows everything.” Jobs then pulled out a *Life* magazine depicting starving children in Biafra and asked his pastor, “Does God know about this and what’s going to happen to these children?” The pastor answered, “Steve, I know you don’t understand, but yes, God knows that.”

Steve Jobs never again darkened the door of a church. The pastor missed the opportunity to follow up, to take time

with Jobs, and to help him know he had asked a good question and there is an answer to that question. When Rich Hammar read that account he said to himself, “Not on my watch!” He gathered around him a group of high school students who meet regularly with him. They are free to ask any question on any subject.

All of us need to have the same response as Rich, “Not on my watch!” We must not lose our young people. We must spend the time and resources to make sure we do everything in our power to effectively mentor the next generation, as Elijah did with Elisha.

The young man Elisha must have been in charge of the family farm since he shut down the business by killing all twenty-four oxen and roasting the meat on the fire made from the destroyed plowing equipment. The Bible doesn't

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tell us how his mom and dad reacted to that; but certainly, Elisha's actions let them know their son had chosen a different path. He set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant, but even more than that, his son in the faith.

I want to challenge the older generation to go looking for Elishas, to go looking for Timothys. Like Elisha, that young person may be a farmer or like Timothy come from a mixed-faith family. That young person could be a young girl or a young man. Are we willing to open our churches so that the selection of a leader pastor could just as well be a God-called and Spirit-empowered woman as well as a man? I'm seeing many young women whom God is calling into vocational ministry. But how can they fulfill their call if the doors are closed to them because they are a woman? Are we ministers asking God, "Show me who is my Elisha. Show me

who is my Timothy. And, show me who is my Priscilla. Who is my Deborah?”

In addition to looking for your Elisha, do you have time to be followed or is that young man or woman an annoyance to you? How can a generation follow if no one is willing to spend their valuable time with them? Jesus didn't just preach to or teach disciples; He lived with them. This generation needs deeply rooted believers to live with them, so they may learn by example.

I also want to challenge the younger generation, “Are you willing to leave everything for the cause of Jesus and carry into your generation the work of the Lord? How does that work out in the daily fabric of your life? Are you seeking out opportunities to serve someone who can show you the way? Instead of asking them to ‘pour into you’, start by asking yourself how you

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can ‘pour into them’ and be a blessing.” It’s called reverse mentoring. It’s what I do when I don’t know how to operate my iPhone. I just ask my grandson. He mentors me.

To our young men and women, are you willing to serve the Lord even if you don’t have an Elijah in your life? The prophet Samuel had a bad example in the generation above him—a priest who was corrupt—but that did not stop him from serving the Lord and making something significant of his life.

But, let’s get back on our walk. Elijah and Elisha started in the hills north of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was very close by—and that would seem a more logical place to head to since the temple was there—and how wonderful it would be for Elijah to take his last breath in such a holy place. But, that’s not the direction they went.

Elijah's ultimate destination was to walk all the way down to the Jordan River, cross it, and move in the direction of the area where God buried Moses on Mount Nebo. Elijah probably thinks he's in for the same end as Moses. But, God likes to do original things, and there's a different end for Elijah than Moses. Let me say this to every generation: don't get your eyes on the undertaker; keep them on the "uppertaker".

Early that morning, probably while it was still dark, Elijah got up. Elisha had sensed through the night the restlessness of his mentor. He prepared a quick breakfast for the two of them and packed a lunch. They walked only a short distance to Gilgal, and Elijah broke the silence: "Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel."

I'm going to spiritualize these stops on the journey, starting with Gilgal. If

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you're familiar with the Book of Joshua, you know that Gilgal was where the children of Israel first camped after crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. The males were circumcised, the first Passover in the land was observed, twelve stones were brought out of the Jordan River bed to make a memorial altar to remind future generations of God's deliverance, and the manna stopped. All that happened about six hundred years before Elisha. It was also at Gilgal centuries later that Samuel confronted King Saul over his disobedience in offering an unauthorized sacrifice to God (1 Samuel 13).

But, immediately we are faced with a geographical issue. Where was Gilgal? We don't know. Some surmise it was just across the Jordan River on the western side. Others feel that Gilgal was perhaps halfway up the ascent, in the midrange of the Benjamin hills. Still

others note that Gilgal simply means a circle or wheel; that just as the city of Springfield is the name given to towns in multiple states, so Gilgal could have been in more than one place and simply meant a camp built in a circle.

I walked this area recently with a knowledgeable guide and I think the most reasonable explanation is that Elijah's Gilgal was the original site of Joshua's encampment and Samuel's confrontation with Saul. It was located about halfway up the Benjamin hills. It wouldn't have made sense for Elijah and Elisha to start out the morning 800 feet below sea level near Jericho and climb up to 2,700 feet above sea level at Bethel, only to walk back down again.

Gilgal represents past spiritual history. It's as though Elijah is saying to Elisha: "Stay here at Gilgal. Immerse yourself

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in all that God did in a long ago generation. Take care of the museum here. Stay at Gilgal and remember all the powerful things that God did in the past. Remember Azusa Street. Remember Hot Springs. Remember the great revivals. Remember the Jesus Movement. Remember the Charismatic Renewal. Stay at Gilgal. The best days are all in the past. Besides, we're midpoint in the hills and I'm heading up another thousand feet to Bethel as my next stop and it will be a rather stiff walk for you. Stay here and be comfortable."

In short, Elijah is saying to Elisha: "We've just begun our walk. Why don't you just stay here?"

For the purposes of this walk, Gilgal also represents the place of beginnings. Some believers spend their entire lives at that Gilgal. They have good intentions. They may even have plans. But, they

never act on them. They catch a vision of what God wants done. They see the needs, feel the tug, but they never get past dreaming what they might do.

I want to tell the younger generation: Don't stop your journey at Gilgal! Keep pressing on!

I look back over my life and see the stages now—Gilgal moments when I could have stayed where I was. One of those times came just after I had become the first full-time campus pastor at what is now Evangel University. The preceding year I had finished my doctoral degree at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. It had been a very trying experience. We had two little children, my wife Jewel became very ill at one point, we were subsisting on minimal income from adjunct teaching, and our low-cost apartment was in a drug-infested

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area. We headed back to Missouri, in our tin can Renault the day after June commencement, degree in hand. As we crossed into Arizona from California, my wife and I agreed we would never raise our kids in California.

Four months later, during a great revival on campus, with a chapel full of one thousand students in the evening service, I felt the Spirit say to me, “Look around here. This isn’t going to be your place of ministry much longer.” I was stunned. I immediately dismissed it as a wayward impression. But a week later, a letter came totally unsolicited from a small church in California, asking if I would consider coming to candidate as pastor. I was tempted to dismiss it out of hand, but I had had that mystical impression.

How do you hear the voice of the Lord?
For almost all of us, we will never hear

the audible voice of God in our earthly lifetimes; and if you do hear the audible voice, then the pattern in Scripture is that you will subsequently suffer greatly and that's why God spoke to you audibly at the start. But, for most of us the voice of God is still and quiet. I've learned that times of prayer contain moments when the Holy Spirit drops something into your heart. Listen to that impression. If it's from the Lord, it will be confirmed by events. It will be confirmed by others. It will be confirmed in your own life experience.

Long story short, the Lord confirmed that we should go to this church. Many of my friends and mentors told me, "Stay here." I understood their concern. It was a huge risk to step out of the safety of having a thousand students required to listen to you preach every week into a small church with sixty people who could leave at any time. But, had I

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stayed I certainly would not be on this platform tonight.

I want to tell young people and young ministers: don't get stuck. Get the training you need. Get the education you need. Get the practical experience you need. Listen closely to the Spirit. The easiest thing in the world is to stay where you are, where it's comfortable. It's far easier to have big ideas and big dreams than to take the risks to make them happen.

There's an interesting postscript to the Gilgal moment. Much later, after Elisha had received the double portion, he returned to Gilgal. There was a famine there. While having dinner with the local pastors, the company of prophets, poison had gotten into the stew. It would have killed them all; that is, it would have killed them all had Elisha originally stayed at Gilgal. But because he had refused to stay, because he had

been determined to receive a double portion of Elijah's spirit, he had the power to render the poison harmless.

As Pentecostals, we can become stuck at our own Gilgals. And, if we don't keep walking in the Spirit, praying in the Spirit, being empowered by the Spirit, we will not have the spiritual discernment and authority to deal with the poison in the pot of our culture, and sometimes the poisonous attitudes in the church as well.

Anyone who doesn't believe our culture has been poisoned need only look at the distresses in family, the power of addiction to drugs and alcohol, the confusion of sexual identity, the taking of life in and out of the womb, sex trafficking, racial animosity, and the desperate plight of orphans, widows, and the poor. At the root of everything is the poison of sin. If this

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generation is not filled with the Spirit, if this generation only stays at the Gilgal of good intentions or the museum of Pentecostal history, then there will be no cure for the poison in the pot. The present culture may be more godless than any Elijah or Elisha ever faced. This evil day demands that God's people have a double portion of His Spirit.

Not only that, unless we have Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered leaders we will continue to have toxic churches that are more a blemish to the cause of Christ than a shining example of His grace, mercy, and love. It's going to take a generation of spiritually healthy leaders to ensure that there is a spiritually healthy church!

At Gilgal, Elijah said, "Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel." Notice the word *me*. "The Lord has sent *me*." In other words, the Lord has sent *me*,

not *you*. You can stay here if you want. You don't have to go. You can stay in a place where one day you will not have the power to deal with what comes your way, or you can decide to come with me and obtain from God what you will need.

Elisha did not stay at Gilgal. He said to Elijah, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." For the next several hours Elisha walked southwest and uphill the seven miles to Bethel with Elijah. Nothing is said of their conversation. Perhaps they did not have one.

When they arrived at Bethel, a company of prophets met Elisha and asked him, "Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?"

"Yes, I know," Elisha replied, "so be quiet."

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In other words, Elijah had not only known that this was his last day; Elisha knew it as well. And, a second time Elijah tells Elisha to stay put: “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.”

God was leading in stages, as He always does. First, Elijah only says that he is going to Bethel; then at Bethel, he says God is sending him to Jericho; and at Jericho he says God is sending him to the Jordan.

The Lord is leading each of us in stages as well, and it's very possible that we can get stuck at any of the stages and thereby miss what God has for us.

Bethel was the place of dreams and spiritual disaster. It was where Jacob, when he was fleeing Esau, had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God ascending

and descending on it. It was in that moment that God spoke to him that his descendants would be like the dust of the earth, and where God promised, “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Genesis 28:15).

Almost one thousand years after Jacob, and one hundred years before Elisha, Bethel was desecrated by King Jeroboam I. There he set up a golden calf and installed his own priests to offer sacrifices. You will remember that Jeroboam I rebelled against Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, setting up the northern kingdom of ten tribes called Israel.

Bethel is the place where the dream turned bad and God was rejected. If Elisha stayed there without the double

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portion, he would not be able to deal with the spiritual apostasy and rebellion against God in that place. Not long after grabbing the mantle of Elijah, Elisha returned to Bethel. A group of young men openly jeered at him, saying, “Go on up, you baldhead! Go on up, you baldhead!”

It’s uncertain whether they were telling Elisha to keep walking up into Bethel, or whether they’ve heard of Elijah’s ascent and are mocking it by taunting Elisha to do the same thing. If so, they had not believed at all in the story told them of Elijah being taken into heaven.

Their disbelief is duplicated in a far more serious way following the resurrection of Jesus. The very first people who knew for a fact that Jesus had risen from the dead were the people who had put Him to death. They covered up the true story by bribing the

soldiers who had guarded the tomb, paying them a large sum of money to say that the disciples of Jesus had stolen the body from the tomb. In other words, what kept the religious leaders from believing was their own inward corruption. Intellectually, they knew that what the soldiers were saying was true, but their hearts were corrupt.

Believers in any age face the kind of godless opposition that Elisha faced later at Bethel or that the followers of Jesus faced in the apostolic era and in the present era. Had Elisha not gone on with Elijah, had he remained at Bethel, he never would have had the authority to break the spiritual resistance among the mockers at Bethel. Had the disciples of Jesus not remained in Jerusalem until they received power from on high, they never could have faced the future persecution and difficulties arrayed against them.

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In fact, it's fascinating to note that although Jesus appeared to about five hundred after His resurrection, only 120 were in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost. What happened to the other 380? What happens to the multiplied thousands of people who show up on Easter or Christmas Sunday but never remain behind to be discipled? You look for them and they are gone.

Bethel is the place where remains the trappings of a glorious past and the present experience of compromise and surrender to the world. It's the place where cynics say, "Where is your God?" It's a place where the culture—political, entertainment, and media—openly mocks those who believe the Bible is our authoritative source and standard for both belief and behavior. A powerless ministry, a powerless church will not do well at Bethel.

Elisha knew that his time to stay at Bethel could not come until he experienced the double portion of the spirit of Elijah. He repeated the very same words at Bethel to Elijah that he had spoken at Gilgal, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So, he continued his walk with Elijah. It’s another twelve miles downhill to Jericho. It’s early afternoon when they reach there.

As with the prophets at Bethel, the prophets of Jericho also knew that this is the last day for Elijah. They said to Elisha, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?” Elisha acknowledged that he knew and asked them to stop talking about it.

Elijah heard the conversation and, for a third time, told Elisha to quit walking with him, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.”

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Six centuries before Elisha, the walls had fallen flat at Jericho when Israel marched around them. It was the scene of the first great victory in the land of promise. But, its past was nowhere near the equal to its present.

It was a barren unfruitful land with a foul water supply (2 Kings 2:19).

“Stay here, Elisha. Stay in this place that’s living on past memories. See if you can do anything to cure its problems.”

But, Elisha knew the solution was not to stay there. If he stayed there without the double portion, he never would have had power to turn the bitter water to sweet.

I recall my first part-time paid position in the ministry. I was serving as youth pastor in an historic Assemblies of God church in the center of a major urban

area. The church, in its heyday, had over a thousand members. By the time I got there, it was down to between three and four hundred. Ultimately, it would slide all the way down to thirty people rattling around in a nine hundred-seat sanctuary. The church building was located in the midst of a changing demographic area and the current adherents simply did not want to reach out to people whose ethnicity, language, and culture was different from their own. They preferred to live in the past glory of that church, to talk about its wonderful heritage, and live off the investments of the former generations who had bought and paid for the property. But, the church was barren of evangelism and marked by its pride in the past and its nonrecognition of its present spiritual barrenness.

It's truly frightening to reflect on how many formerly great churches are either

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out of existence or a shadow of what they once were. They are our Jerichos. But, they can be revived and flourish again if there is leadership that is filled with the Spirit! The very church I just referred to is again being powerfully used of God.

For sure, I don't want to oversimplify here. Yes, Elisha knew he needed more than he presently had. But what he already had was not in a vacuum. He had spent years watching Elijah and being taught by him. He observed how Elijah dealt with political leaders and learned faith from seeing the miracles Elijah performed. Elisha must have had some dealings with other prophets in the land because they came up to him at both Bethel and Jericho. If Elisha had taken a biblical knowledge test, he would have passed it with flying colors. He knew about the God of Elijah and he knew the God of Elijah. He understood

redemptive history and knew the great lessons of the past—beginning with Adam and Eve, continuing with Noah and on to Abraham, and the bondage and deliverance of God’s people. The temple at Jerusalem, built by Solomon, was still standing.

Elisha was not an empty suit waiting to be struck by spiritual lightning so that he would be filled. He had denied himself by leaving his father’s farm, spent years in obscurity serving and learning from Elijah. The question that day of the walk is whether all that preparation was worth it or had it been in vain. Elisha knew he needed more than what he had. That’s why he was on that long walk with Elijah. He could not let Elijah say good-bye until he had some of what Elijah had.

The prophets at Bethel and Jericho had nothing to give him. That’s why he clung

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to Elijah. The older generation needs to have something of spiritual vitality that the younger generation will want. The older generation needs to give the younger generation blessing rather than criticism, faith rather than doubt, opportunity rather than obstruction.

I encourage the younger pastors in our Fellowship: Get all the education you can. Read all the books you can, especially the ones that are commentaries on the Scripture. Go lighter on the method books and go deeper into God's Word. Seek out the examples of ministry that you admire. Learn from them. Learn from everyone you can. Get the very best training in the world. Elisha had the best training of his day. But, when it's all said and done, you don't have enough. Elisha recognized that.

He didn't have what it took to deal with the spiritual issues at Gilgal, Bethel,

and Jericho. He could have stayed in each of those places; but had he done so, he never would have parted the waters of the Jordan (2:14), purified the water at Jericho (2:19–22), miraculously supplied oil for a widow and her sons (4:1–7), brought a dead son back to life (4:32–37), saved the lives of prophets by nullifying poison in the stew (4:38–41), multiplied loaves to feed the hungry (4:42–44), instructed Naaman how to be healed from leprosy (5:1–19), or floated an iron axe head (6:1–7).

It's the task of believers to bring the antidote to the poison affecting the steams of life, to throw in the salt of the gospel, to make iron swim—the iron that weighs people down with sorrow, sickness, suffering, sin, or transgression.

Elisha's entire ministry may be summed up in two themes: *word* and *deed*. He spoke insightful words at just the right

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time and God used him to do deeds that on the surface were impossible. God is calling this generation to do the same. The floating of the iron axe head is emblematic of what God wants to do in this generation. He wants people who are willing to tackle the impossible. It's not possible to make an iron axe float. And, many look at our country today and say, "The culture is headed in an irreversible direction. We can do nothing about it." Or, we can be filled with the Spirit and believe anew that with God all things are possible; that a great spiritual awakening can come again to this nation; that the two billion people in this world who have never had a chance to know who Jesus is will have that opportunity; that this generation will, in the power of the Spirit, do the greatest work of evangelism the world has ever seen with signs and wonders following the proclamation of the gospel! "God, give us a generation of

people who have power to make iron axe heads float!”

There has never been a greater need for Spirit-filled believers, for Spirit-filled ministers than right now!

We are called to minister at Gilgal where the Spirit wants to breathe new life into churches that are living on their memories, but where there is no vision that is acted upon—lots of Pentecostal words, but lacking Pentecostal demonstration, starting things but never finishing them.

We are called to minister at Bethel, where past spiritual successes have been replaced by compromise and abandonment of the faith.

We are called to minister at Jericho, where the spiritual atmosphere is dry and there has not been any rain from

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the Spirit of God for a long, long time. But, like Elisha, we cannot stay in those places until we have received power from on high. Our training only takes us so far. Our education and life experience only take us so far. Our skill sets and background only take us so far. If the Pentecostal Movement has one word that we should cherish is it this word: *more*. We must always seek more of Him.

The infilling of the Spirit is not just a one-time event. We use the word *initial* for the physical evidence of the baptism in the Spirit because it is only initial. Every day we need more of the Spirit because there is more of us to fill than there was yesterday. We each have new challenges, new circumstances, new opportunities, and yesterday's supply will not be enough for what we need today.

Although Elisha lived long before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, he clearly understood this concept of “more.” He needed more than he had if he were to carry on the work of the Lord in his generation. That’s why he refused three times to stay put—at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. He was going to press through until he received the empowerment he needed. Without it, he knew he could never be effective.

When Elijah went past Jericho and walked east another five miles to the Jordan River, on its western bank he did not tell Elisha to “stay” any more. I can almost see the smile on Elijah’s face. His anointed successor has passed all the tests during that long day. It’s now late into the afternoon and Elijah was no longer the dour pessimist hiding in a cave and saying, “I’m the last one left and God’s cause ends when I die.”

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Instead, he knew the future was secure because the next generation was determined to press on. The defeatist Elijah now confidently took off his coat and hit the Jordan River water in his last miraculous act. The waters parted and they both passed through the river.

Elijah now asked the question he probably had wanted to ask all day, but the time was not right until now: “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?”

Elisha had been hoping all day for the question to be asked. He was immediately ready with his answer: “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit.”

Let’s stop and consider that request for just a moment. It’s probably one of the most misinterpreted passages of the Bible. Commonly, you’ll hear it

expounded that Elisha was asking for a ministry two times more powerful than Elijah, and that will be illustrated by reference to there being twice as many miracles recorded under Elisha's ministry than Elijah's. But, it would also have been a very egotistical thing for Elisha to say, "I want to be twice as good as you were."

So, if Elisha was not asking to be twice as powerful as Elijah, what was he asking? Here is where Scripture itself gives the answer. Deuteronomy 21:17 gives the law of inheritance as it relates to the firstborn son who is to be given a double share of the inheritance compared to what goes to his younger siblings.

So, Elisha was not asking for more than Elijah had as that would be very egotistical. He was simply asking for a greater share of the Spirit than his own

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contemporaries, the other prophets. After all, there were already prophets who had met them at Bethel and Jericho; but those prophets had not asked to join the walk with Elijah. They had held back as observers.

I'll tell you this. Those in this generation who desire to press through to receive the Spirit's filling, the Spirit's enablement, the Spirit's blessing, the Spirit's empowerment will be far more used of God in this generation than their contemporaries who prefer to stay behind with a more limited ministry and impact.

It's not egotistical to want more of the Spirit than your contemporaries. They have the same right as you do to ask for more. But, if they don't, that should not keep you from asking.

I think we also must recognize that

unlike Elisha, most of us—if not all of us—have more than one mentor. Think for a moment of the persons who most impacted your life spiritually and what you want to draw into your life from them. I want the double portion of the work ethic of my father—a pioneer missionary and pastor; I want the deep spirituality and love my mother always demonstrated. I want the tenacity of my Uncle Victor Plymire who served in Tibet and remained faithful to the call of God despite incredible hardship. And, I could go on to name at least ten people in my life from whom I want a substantial share, a double portion, of what they had. I have to ask myself, “Does anyone want what I have?” That question scares me and sobers me.

This matter of the double portion contains a double application. The first is simply, “Have I identified what I want from the spiritual fathers and mothers

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who have shaped me?” And, secondly, “What from my life does anyone want a substantial share of?”

Elisha wanted to receive a double share of the inheritance that belongs to the firstborn son. And, just as Elijah was taken up into heaven, Elisha cried out with a term that had defined their relationship, the term that had motivated him to invoke the promise of the double portion from Deuteronomy 21:17. Elisha said, “My father! My father!” As the spiritually adopted son of Elijah, Elisha had asked for the double portion that belonged to the firstborn son.

Elisha was not being selfish. He knew that if he was to do what God called him to do, he needed power that he did not presently possess. He wasn't asking for wealth or position, but to be controlled by the Spirit of God. We must learn that we will never be able to do what

the Lord has saved and called us to do without His power. The church can never be effective if it tries to operate only on the machinery of human wisdom and power. It is indeed, “ ‘not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

One generation steps off the stage and another comes on. There will be a successful handoff to the next Pentecostal generation if that generation desires as earnestly as Elisha a double portion of the Spirit's power. There's a wonderful sentence tucked away in 2 Kings 8:4 where the king of Israel talked with Gehazi the servant of Elisha. He said, “Tell me about all the great things Elisha has done.” Would that when our time is done it can be said of us by a generation yet to follow, “Tell me all about the great things God has done through you.”

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God wants to do great things through the emerging Elisha generation.

But, I want you to know that sometimes a handoff goes badly.

Gehazi was in the same servant relationship to Elisha that Elisha had been to Elijah. But, greed for material things derailed Gehazi as a successor.

Nearly sixty years after Elisha had asked for a double portion, his last conversation was with the fourth king of Israel to rule during his lifetime, Jehoash. Jehoash was just beginning his reign. Elisha was suffering from the illness from which he died. Jehoash went to him and said the very same words to Elisha that decades before Elisha had said to Elijah, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel” (2 Kings 13:14).

Elisha couldn't get out of his deathbed and take Jehoash for a walk. But, Elisha wanted to test Jehoash. He told him to open the east window and shoot an arrow. Jehoash did so and Elisha declared that the sent arrow meant Jehoash would have victory over the Arameans. Then, Elisha told Jehoash to take the arrows and strike the ground. Jehoash struck the ground only three times.

Elisha instantly knew that Jehoash did not have what it took to be successful. On Elijah's last day, Elisha kept going and did not stay at Gilgal, Bethel, or Jericho. He pressed on until he obtained what he sought. Not so with Jehoash. No wonder Elisha was angry with him for only striking the ground three times. Although Jehoash used the same words as Elisha had, "My father! My father!" they were just words without the same tenacity as Elisha

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had. Parenthetically, we must be very concerned that we proclaim the gospel “not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:4).

Jehoash quit before he should have, and Elisha’s last words before his death were to Jehoash: “You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times” (2 Kings 13:14–20).

Jehoash’s reign would ultimately be a disaster. He named his son Jeroboam after the first king of Israel who had set up the golden calf at Bethel. His son became worse than him; and it was said of Jehoash, “He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused

Israel to commit; he continued in them” (2 Kings 13:11).

Tonight we have looked at the transfer spiritually from one generation to another. Because Elisha persevered on that last long day’s walk in Elijah’s life, the rest of the next almost sixty years was marked by him being powerfully used of the Lord. But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, did not have the same tenacity and he was sidelined because of a wrong spirit. And the young king, Jehoash, proved ineffective throughout his reign because at the beginning he was not willing to demonstrate the kind of commitment that makes for effective leadership.

What about you?

Leaders, I hope you pass your mantle and invest real-life hours with the next generation so they are ready to receive

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the mantle from you. Will you do that?
Are you being intentional?

Young people, I believe your generation is ready to receive. But, are you ready to serve? Are you ready to take the long, hard journey that Elisha took and never give up? Will you keep going in your journey or will you be sidetracked?

No matter whether you are young or old, what do you want the Lord to do in your life and ministry?

Are you content to stay at Gilgal reliving the past but not stepping forward into the future? If you stay in Gilgal, you never will have the power to deal with the spiritual famine in the land.

Are you content to stay at Bethel without the power to face the godless opposition of this age?

Are you content to stay at Jericho and live in the past, the idealized history of what God did back then, but not have the power to accomplish what God wants to do today?

Or, do you want a double portion in your life this evening?

Oh yes, Elijah could have dealt with the challenges at Gilgal, at Bethel, and at Jericho. But, each generation leaves some things undone. Those are the opportunities that face the next generation. Young people and young ministers in this room, my generation has not finished the task. We may have made some progress—but, there is so much that is left undone. Will you stay at Gilgal? Will you stay at Bethel? Will you stay at Jericho? Or will you refuse to settle for the easy path, for the second- or third-best in your life? Will you go all the way with God?

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This could be as critical a moment for you as that long day was for Elisha. One walk changed the course of the next almost six decades of his life. Moments matter. This is God's moment for you. Do you want to be in a position where the God of heaven is using you for His glory in this world? Where are you in the journey this evening? At Gilgal? At Bethel? At Jericho? Or are you following hard after God? Do you long to see God move in greater power? Do you want to experience personally the theme of this General Council, to soar into the future with the wind of the Spirit of God lifting you? If He is calling you, then come and seek Him for the double portion you need for your life, your family, and your church.

