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Dear Friends,

There is a longing deep within every human heart to encounter God.

We long for certainty in a world of uncertainty. We long for assurance when life feels fragile. We long to know that our lives have purpose and that the path we are walking is truly God's will for us. For many believers, this longing expresses itself in a desire for powerful spiritual experiences. We read the accounts of revival, hear testimonies of dramatic conversions, and listen to stories of extraordinary encounters with God. Something within us awakens and says, "I want that too."

Such longing is not wrong. Indeed, it often springs from a sincere desire to know God more deeply.

Throughout Scripture, God reveals Himself in remarkable ways. Moses encountered Him in the burning bush. Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up. The disciples witnessed Christ transfigured before their eyes. The Holy Spirit descended upon the early Church with power at Pentecost. God is not opposed to revealing His glory. At times He grants His children profound encounters that leave a lasting mark upon their lives.

Yet there is a truth we often overlook.

A powerful encounter with God may reveal Him to us, but it does not necessarily reveal us to ourselves.

In moments of spiritual ecstasy we may genuinely see the beauty of Christ. We may feel overwhelmed by His love. We may be willing to surrender everything. Yet much of our own heart remains hidden. We do not yet fully understand our motivations, our expectations, our fears, our wounds, or the assumptions that shape our decisions.

We may believe we know ourselves well. Yet time often reveals otherwise.

Many Christians can look back upon a season when they experienced God in a powerful way. They dedicated themselves afresh to Christ. They embraced a particular ministry, vocation, community, or form of service. Their commitment was sincere and wholehearted.

Yet years later they find themselves facing questions they never expected.

The path that once seemed so clear no longer appears as certain. The ministry that once felt like a perfect fit now feels different. The expectations they carried have not unfolded as they imagined. Some even begin to wonder whether they misunderstood God altogether.

These moments can be deeply unsettling. Yet perhaps such experiences are not evidence that we have lost our way. Perhaps they are evidence that God is leading us from illusion into truth.

One of the great misconceptions of the Christian life is the belief that spiritual experiences automatically produce spiritual maturity. While encounters with God can be transformative, they do not eliminate the lifelong process of growth. They do not instantly grant self-knowledge. They do not remove the need for humility, discernment, and ongoing surrender.

In fact, some of God's deepest work begins after the experience has passed. This is what makes Elijah's story so profoundly relevant.

Few people in Scripture experienced God's power more dramatically than Elijah. He stood before kings without fear. He witnessed miraculous provision. He raised the dead. He called down fire from heaven. Through his ministry entire nations were confronted with the reality of the living God.

If anyone could have built their faith upon spiritual experiences, it was Elijah. Yet after the triumph on Mount Carmel we find him running for his life. The prophet of fire becomes the prophet in the cave. The man who had witnessed God's power now struggles to trust God's purposes.

The servant who had stood courageously before hundreds now sits alone in despair. How can this be? How can a man who experienced so much of God become so discouraged?

The answer reveals something important about all of us. Experiences alone cannot sustain the soul.

The fire upon Mount Carmel was real. The miracle was real. The victory was real. Yet none of these things addressed the deeper struggles hidden within Elijah's heart.

When Jezebel threatened him, Elijah fled into the wilderness. Eventually he arrived at Sinai and took refuge in a cave. There he poured out his disappointment before God. His words reveal a man whose expectations had collapsed.

- *He believed he was alone.*
- *He believed his labour had been in vain.*
- *He believed God's purposes were failing.*
- *He believed that everything depended upon him.*

In many ways Elijah's despair was born from conclusions that seemed reasonable but were not true.

How often we find ourselves in the same place.

- *We look at circumstances and draw conclusions.*
- *We interpret disappointments as failures.*
- *We assume that unanswered questions indicate God's absence.*
- *We see only what is directly in front of us and imagine that we understand the whole story.*

Yet our perspective is often as limited as Elijah's. This is especially true when it comes to a calling and ministry.

Many of us begin serving God with sincere devotion. We want to give Him our best. We want our lives to matter. We want to be useful in His kingdom.

In these seasons we often make commitments that are genuine but not yet fully tested.

- *We embrace particular roles.*
- *We embrace certain identities.*
- *We adopt visions of what we believe our future will look like.*

The commitment is real. The love for Christ is real. Yet we are still learning who we are. Only time can reveal what enthusiasm alone cannot.

Life has a remarkable way of exposing the difference between idealism and reality.

- *Relationships reveal our weaknesses.*
- *Responsibilities expose our limitations.*
- *Disappointments uncover our expectations.*
- *Suffering reveals our hidden fears.*
- *Years of service show us what is sustainable and what is not.*

Through all these things God slowly reveals our heart to us. This process can be deeply painful because it often feels like loss.

The image we carried of ourselves begins to crack. The future we imagined may not unfold as expected. The certainty we once possessed gives way to questions.

Yet it is often here that God's most profound work begins. For the goal of the Christian life is not to preserve an image of ourselves. The goal is truth.

God desires truth in the inward parts. He is not interested in maintaining our illusions, no matter how spiritual they may appear. He loves us too much to leave us imprisoned by them.

Sometimes what we call a crisis of faith is actually a crisis of truth. God is gently dismantling assumptions that can no longer sustain us. He is freeing us from identities we have outgrown. He is inviting us to build our lives not upon experiences, roles, or expectations, but upon Himself.

This same challenge extends beyond individuals to ministries and Christian communities. Many ministries begin through extraordinary acts of faith. They are birthed through prayer, sacrifice, vision, and dependence upon God. Lives are changed and the work flourishes.

Yet over time another challenge emerges. The future becomes a concern. Who will continue the work? Who will replace current leaders? How will the ministry survive? Will there be enough workers? Will the vision continue?

These are understandable questions. Yet there is a subtle danger hidden within them. When fear begins to replace trust, ministries can slowly move from discerning God's will to securing their future.

Without realising it, preserving the ministry can become more important than waiting upon God.

- *People may be encouraged towards commitments because there is a need.*
- *Enthusiasm may be interpreted as a calling.*
- *Availability may be mistaken for vocation.*
- *Loyalty may be confused with lifelong suitability.*

The pressure is rarely intentional. Most often it arises from genuine concern. Yet whenever the future of a ministry becomes more important than the freedom of an individual to discern God's voice, something precious is lost.

The kingdom of God has never depended upon human management.

- *God called Abraham.*
- *God called Moses.*
- *God called David.*
- *Jesus called His disciples.*

The initiative has always belonged to Him. Elijah's story reminds us of this truth. While Elijah sat in the cave believing he was alone, God revealed that there were seven thousand faithful people whom Elijah knew nothing about.

The kingdom was not in danger. God's purposes had not failed.

The future was secure because it rested in God's hands. What Elijah could not see, God was already accomplishing.

What a lesson this is for both individuals and ministries. We are often tempted to carry responsibilities that belong to God alone. We worry about outcomes. We fear what may happen. We try to secure futures that only God can provide.

Yet faith calls us to trust that God is capable of sustaining what He has begun. Perhaps this is why the climax of Elijah's story is so surprising. God sends a mighty wind. The wind is powerful enough to shatter rocks. Then comes an earthquake. Then comes fire. Each manifestation reveals something of God's greatness. Each demonstrates His authority. Each displays His power.

Yet Scripture tells us that God was not in them. Then comes the gentle whisper. Mother Basilea Schlink beautifully observed that this was the moment in which God revealed His innermost heart.

Elijah had already witnessed enough power to last a lifetime. Power was not what he lacked. What he lacked was perspective. What he lacked was truth. What he lacked was a deeper revelation of God's love.

The broken prophet did not need another miracle. He needed to know that God was still at work.

- *He needed to know that he was not alone.*
- *He needed to know that God's purposes had not failed.*
- *He needed to encounter the Father's heart.*

Perhaps this is what many Christians need today. We live in a culture fascinated by the spectacular. We are drawn to what is dramatic, visible, and impressive. Yet the deepest work of God often takes place in hidden places.

It happens when our assumptions are challenged. It happens when our illusions are dismantled. It happens when our need for certainty is surrendered. It happens when we stop trying to control the future and begin trusting the God who already holds it.

The whisper of God accomplishes what the fire often cannot:

The fire may inspire us.
The whisper transforms us.

The fire may awaken us.
The whisper heals us.

The fire may reveal God's power.
The whisper reveals His heart.

This is where true intimacy begins. Not in the excitement of extraordinary experiences, but in the quiet confidence that God is faithful even when we do not understand His ways. Not in possessing all the answers, but in trusting the One who does. Not in preserving every dream we once held, but in allowing God to lead us into His reality.

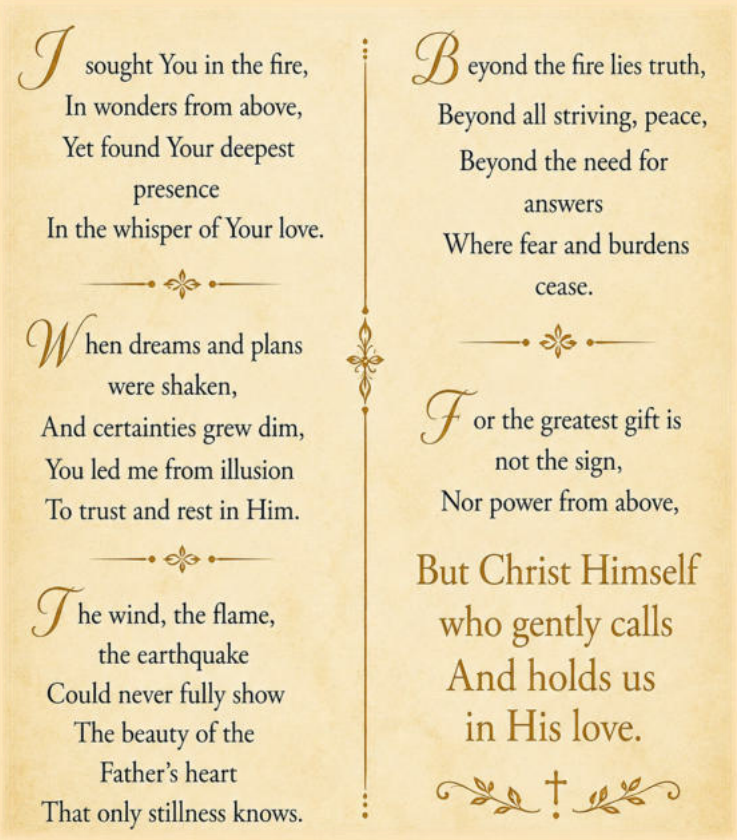
The mature Christian eventually discovers that faith is not built upon ecstasy. Ecstasy comes and goes. Emotions rise and fall. Experiences fade into memory. But truth remains. God remains. His faithfulness remains. His love remains.

This is why some of the most spiritually mature people speak less about dramatic experiences and more about God's faithfulness. They have learned that intimacy with God is forged not only in moments of inspiration but also in seasons of confusion. They have discovered that God is present not only on Mount Carmel but also in the cave. Not only in victory but also in disappointment. Not only in certainty but also in surrender. And perhaps this is the invitation before each of us.

To move beyond the fire. Beyond the need for constant confirmation, acceptance and belonging from those around us. Beyond the illusion that we fully understand ourselves. Beyond the fear that everything depends upon us. Beyond the striving to secure what belongs to God. And into the gentle whisper of His love. For it is there that truth emerges. It is there that healing begins. It is there that intimacy is formed. And it is there that we discover that the greatest miracle was never the fire from heaven.

The greatest miracle is the God who lovingly leads us out of our caves, out of our illusions, and into the freedom of truth. For beyond the fire lies something greater. Beyond the spectacular lies the Father's heart. And beyond ecstasy lies intimacy.

There, in the stillness of His love, we discover a faith that can endure every season of life.



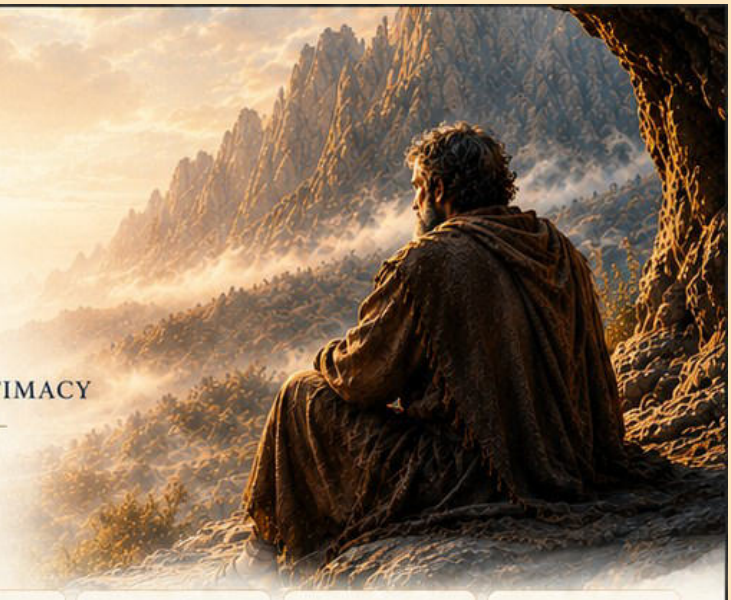
Thank you for your prayers, friendship and support.
May God bless each one of you abundantly!

The Evangelical Sisters of Mary

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Canaan of God's Comfort—Australia

31 DAILY *Watchwords*

FROM ECSTASY TO TRUTH • FROM ILLUSION TO INTIMACY



> *God is not found in the spectacular, but in the stillness of His love.*

DAY 1
Longing
God welcomes our desire to know Him deeply.

DAY 2
Surrender
Release your expectations into God's hands.

DAY 3
Listening
Be attentive to God's voice beneath the noise.

DAY 4
Discernment
Not every strong feeling is God's direction.

DAY 5
Honesty
Allow God to reveal the true condition of your heart.

DAY 6
Humility
Walk in the freedom of not having all the answers.

DAY 7
Trust
God is working beyond what you can presently see.

DAY 8
Patience
God's timing often differs from our expectations.

DAY 9
Faithfulness
Continue walking even when certainty is absent.

DAY 10
Purification
God lovingly removes illusions that hinder intimacy.

DAY 11
Reality
Embrace what is true rather than what is comfortable.

DAY 12
Dependence
The Christian life is sustained by grace, not effort.

DAY 13
Courage
Do not fear the questions God is bringing to light.

DAY 14
Stillness
The whisper of God is heard in quiet places.

DAY 15
Perspective
God sees the whole story when we see only a part.

DAY 16
Release
Let go of what God is no longer asking you to carry.

DAY 17
Truth
Truth may wound our pride but heals our soul.

DAY 18
Freedom
Christ calls us to follow Him, not our assumptions.

DAY 19
Renewal
God is able to restore weary hearts.

DAY 20
Alignment
Allow your desires to come into harmony with God's will.

DAY 21
Wisdom
Spiritual maturity grows through tested experience.

DAY 22
Compassion
Extend grace to yourself and others on the journey.

DAY 23
Perseverance
Remain faithful when the path becomes unclear.

DAY 24
Refinement
God shapes His servants through both joy and disappointment.

DAY 25
Trustworthiness
God remains faithful when our understanding fails.

DAY 26
Intimacy
Seek the Giver more than His gifts.

DAY 27
Rest
Your future is safer in God's hands than your own.

DAY 28
Hope
God is working even when His work is hidden.

DAY 29
Transformation
The greatest miracle is a heart becoming like Christ.

DAY 30
Abandonment
Place every plan, ministry, and dream before God.

DAY 31
Love
Beyond the fire, beyond the questions, beyond the journey itself, we discover the Father's heart.

BEYOND THE FIRE LIES SOMETHING GREATER – THE FATHER'S HEART.

From ecstasy to truth. From illusion to intimacy.