

## **DIGGING OUT FROM ADVERSITY**

**By Ed Thompson**

For years I have been intrigued by the power of telling stories. I believe every one of us has a story, a story worth telling. I am about to demonstrate for you that even a donkey has a story, a "dirty" little story.

This tale concerns a farmer's donkey that stumbled and fell into an old, dry well. Upon discovering the incident, the farmer evaluated various possibilities for freeing his beloved donkey, which had come to be regarded as a virtual member of the family.

Finally, finding no viable solution for getting the donkey out of the very deep well, the farmer decided to fill the well with dirt. The farmer felt deeply grieved, knowing this meant burying the donkey alive. But he consoled himself, knowing no one else would suffer the same disastrous fate as the clumsy donkey.

As the farmer emptied each shovel of dirt into the well, it fell on the donkey's back. Undaunted, the donkey merely shook off the dirt and packed each shovelful of earth under his feet. Amazingly, after a few hours and hundreds of shovel loads of dirt, the donkey had risen above the edge of the well. With a lurch, it jumped over the side of the well and trotted off. What initially had seemed like the donkey's demise turned out to be its salvation.

Under stress, which of us could confront such a crisis and rise up victoriously like the donkey? We all encounter pitfalls and "dirty" physical, spiritual, and emotional burdens on the path of life. You might be confronting one right now. The question is: How can we sift through and overcome these adversities? We sometimes hear people state they are "doing all right *under the circumstances*." When I hear this, I feel tempted to reply, "What are you doing under there?"

This donkey story reminds me of a very different account, from the Bible, that had similar results. It is the story of the prophet Elijah, recounted in 1 Kings, chapters 18 and 19. It would be worth your time to read the two chapters in their entirety, but here is a brief summation.

After a decisive victory on Mt. Carmel confronting prophets of false gods, Elijah, the prophet for the true God of Israel, went into a depression. As is sometimes the case following events that send emotions soaring to unprecedented peaks, Elijah's emotions plunged. Perhaps it was stress hormones subsiding once the crisis was overcome, but the prophet suddenly felt incapable of facing another problem.

Some readers fault Elijah, claiming he lacked faith. The truth is, this prophet was not indestructible. He was a man with human weaknesses, "*a man just like us*" (James 5:17). After participating in the supernatural defeat of hundreds of false prophets, Elijah's emotional rollercoaster spiraled downward. Upon receiving a threat on his life by Queen Jezebel, Elijah succumbed to fear and fled.

If you read the rest of Elijah's story, you will see God orchestrating a divine rescue. Instead of chastising Elijah, God feeds him and lets him rest before restoring him and sending him back to the spiritual battle.

What about you? Are you feeling overwhelmed by adversity? Or maybe you have experienced great victory, either at work or in your home, but feel strangely depleted emotionally. Your energy and motivation are sapped, leaving you feeling like a limp rag. If so, remember the stories of the donkey and the prophet Isaiah. Ask God to restore you – and then be prepared to return to the battle.

*Adapted from the "Weekly E-Blast," weekly devotional from Single Purpose Ministries, by Ed Thompson. He lives near Greensboro, North Carolina, U.S.A. He was an associate staff member with CBMC in Chattanooga, Tennessee.*

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### **Reflection/Discussion Questions**

1. Had you ever heard the story of the donkey before? What is your response to it – what can this teach us for our own lives?
2. What do you typically do when facing serious, even seemingly insurmountable burdens and pressures?
3. If you read the account of Elijah’s triumph over the hundreds of prophets for the false gods of Baal and Asherah, you will see the circumstances of his victory were clearly miraculous. What do you think of his subsequent response when confronted with a death threat from the queen?
4. Has there ever been a time in your life when, like Elijah, you felt you could not face another problem – large or small – and you just wanted to run, to flee from the pressure? If you have – or if something like that should occur in the future – how would you expect God to respond to you? Explain your answer.

*NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:*

1 Kings 18-19; Isaiah 40:31; Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; 1 Peter 5:7