

## Are You Wearing The Right Pair Of Trainers?

Let me introduce you to my trainers. These trainers are not a matching pair, but apart from obvious things like the colour and the design it's fair to say that these two trainers look pretty similar to each other. However they are *completely* different!

Firstly let me give you a **similarity**:

- Both are intended to be worn when I'm being active
- I should be experiencing a raised heartbeat
- My blood should be pounding
- I'm sweating
- All my cylinders are fired up and I'm ready to go!

Now, to explain to you why these trainers are *completely* different, let me introduce you to my '**gym trainer**':

- Tread pattern that provides a high level of traction, necessary in a gym to grip the surface – e.g. when on an incline on the cross trainer
- Quite high around the ankle area in order to give maximum support - on gym machines, you don't need a great deal of movement from your feet so it can afford to be more supportive here even though that means it is a little restrictive
- Non-marking sole – no squeaks

Now, this is my '**running shoe**' – when I bought these I went to a specialised running shop to get my feet properly looked at by a podiatrist, he looked at the way my foot moved, decided whether I was an under, over or normal pronator (that's just a posh way of saying how does my foot hit the ground when I step):

- I'm an over-pronator - he chose this shoe specifically to offer the best shock absorption for my type of running style, so it is dense area in the middle section and has a really firm heel
- It doesn't need as much tread as I'm mainly running in straight lines
- It isn't built up around the ankle - in order to allow my foot to move more freely/be more flexible
- It's one whole size bigger to allow the foot to flex out more whilst I run and therefore avoid injury

So as you can see these trainers are completely different to each other!

Thinking about these two trainers, and getting a little bit more spiritual, the question that God wants to ask of us is: **Are you wearing the right pair of trainers? Maybe you need to lace up a different pair for this part of your journey?**

Using what we've just learnt about my two trainers – should you be wearing a **gym shoe**?:

- Are you facing something in your life that you need to stand strong and firm for?
- Are you being asked of God to be unmoveable, unshakable, determined in something?
- Do you need to get a good grip and stand firm and declare some things over your life?

Or should you be wearing the **running shoe**?:

- Is God asking you to move closer to him?
- Does He want you to press forward, to leave some stuff behind, to move on, to get further?
- Is He asking you to take steps towards something?
- Do you need to take some ground in some areas?

- You are inactive in your Christianity?
- Are you not going anywhere?
- Are you stuck in the same old rut you have been for as long as you can remember?
- You're just not moving forwards. Maybe you are being stubborn about something?
- Are you refusing to move forwards with something that God has asked you to do?
- Maybe you need to forgive someone or go and right some wrongs that are preventing you from moving forwards?

It could be that you are wearing the **running shoe** because:

- You are running away from God?
- You know how you should be living your life, but you're not?
- You need to be facing up to certain things but you are running away from them?
- 

### **Which trainer are you wearing and do you need to lace up a different pair?**

Both types of trainer are found in the life of Elijah - **1 Kings 19**.

A brief recount of Elijah's life up to this point:

When we first meet Elijah we discover that he is God's prophet and he has just announced that there will be a severe drought in the kingdom for the next few years. Elijah is utterly and constantly obedient to that which the Lord is telling him to do, no matter how ridiculous it sounded! For example in 1 Kings 17 God told him he would be fed by ravens and Elijah wholeheartedly trusted God and just got on with it. Such was the man of faith that he was.

As we read on we come to the story of Elijah and the widow who was on her last supplies which she had planned to eat with her son and die. Elijah asked her to feed him instead, reassuring her that she also would be taken care of, and we see the miracle of the jars of flour and oil never running dry. Then we read how Elijah brought the widow's son back to life after he had died. Just after this God instructs Elijah to go back before the King, which in itself was a major thing to ask of Elijah.

There had been a succession of Kings in Israel who did not please the Lord and in fact each had the 'honour' of being described as doing *'more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before them'* – with this present King being the worst. King Ahab was married to Jezebel and indulged in the worship of Baal, he actually made this worship official status at beginning of his reign, whilst at the same time saying he was also worshipping the Lord – a foot in each camp!

Jezebel took particular pleasure in going round and killing off all of the Lord's prophets and in particular they were looking for Elijah, as they believed that he was the one responsible for bringing drought on the land. So, being told to go to the King on behalf of the Lord would have been another mighty situation that Elijah had to face trusting in God.

But Elijah did what God asked of him, he well and truly put on the **gym trainer**, drawing those laces tight and standing firm! In 1 Kings 18 he challenged 450 prophets of Baal up on Mount Carmel to a contest to prove who was the true God. Elijah at that time was the only one of the Lord's prophets left who stood firm with boldness and confidence – I bet that running trainer looked tempting though! The prophets of Baal were to get their god to send fire down on a bull that they had prepared in order to prove that their god was indeed god, but after much shouting and hollering it didn't happen. If you've never read this account then do, as it's quite a humorous story – there's a portion that really makes me chuckle when we read about Elijah taunting them - it's a fabulous example of righteous sarcasm and Godly cynicism!

After this it was Elijah's turn. He made an altar for God, prepared his bull and furthermore went and dug a trench around it and drenched it with water. He was certainly not looking for an easy way out – he was standing firm and strong and confident in the Lord. He prayed a simple prayer and God answered him by

sending down fire. The result was that people proclaimed that the Lord was God, all of the prophets of Baal were put to death and the end of the drought was proclaimed.

The chapter ends with Elijah slipping off his **gym trainer** – he had done the work in standing firm and unshakable – and he now put on his **running trainer**. 1 Kings 18:44 - *'Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.' "Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.'*

Wow! Elijah was divinely powered with extraordinary strength and he ran faster than Ahab's chariot and beat him to their destination – a journey of 15 miles. After everything that had happened on Mount Carmel this was the final symbolic and mighty act of God to show Ahab who the boss was.

Can you imagine how Elijah would have felt?:

- On top of the world - rejoicing in God and his awesome goodness
- Delighted that God's power had been witnessed once and for all in Israel and that the King was now going to put things right in the kingdom
- Can you imagine how brilliant that would feel?

Sadly that didn't happen – Jezebel didn't renounce her worship of Baal and just **three short verses** later we read how instead of popping his **gym trainer** back on and continuing to stand and declare God's mighty power, Elijah kept his **running trainer** on for the wrong reasons. 1 Kings 19:1 - *'Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.'*

What a stark and shocking example of someone wearing the wrong trainers. In the two instances we've just read of Elijah running the reasons couldn't be more different. In one Elijah is bold and courageous, victoriously facing all kinds of odds with the chapter concluding *'the power of the Lord was on Elijah'*. But here in chapter 19, we find Elijah fearful, running scared, exhausted, depressed, and wanting to die.

So what happened?! Well basically after the contest on the mountain Elijah had fully expected things to turn around and change, but it appears that Jezebel was having none of it. Elijah's expectations had been shattered and it resulted in his perspective of the situation to be so distorted that it caused his faith to plummet.

In the NIV Bible the translation says in chapter 19 verse 3 - *'Elijah was afraid and ran for his life'* however in other translations it says *'Elijah saw and ran for his life'* - meaning Elijah heard and understood the situation and thought - 'Right, I'd better physically get myself away from Jezebel so that she can't try and harm me'.

The reason for this difference in the two translations is because the Hebrew word used in this verse can mean either 'afraid' or 'saw' – it's something to do with the way that the vowels are stressed in the word, and apparently some translators just didn't want to attribute the word 'afraid' to the mighty man that was Elijah, and I have to say I'm with them on that. I struggle to see how someone who has seen the hand of God on his life so miraculously over so many years can all of a sudden, especially after such an amazing encounter, get afraid just like that. And then I think about myself.... I'm human and Elijah was human, we've already seen how good he was at sarcasm and being cynical – he was a human being just like us, subject to human emotions just like us, and this is the point in his life where we see that clearly. In fact in James 5:17 we read *'Elijah was a man just like us'* and whilst we should be surprised when we read about him immediately and easily accepting that he would be fed by ravens, we shouldn't be surprised when we see him displaying the same emotions that we do.

To try and understand why Elijah was found to be wearing the wrong trainers and to learn from what I found, I used those six important questions that journalists, and the police use: **'Who?, What?, When?, Why?, Where? and How?'**. Looking at those questions, the first three are easy:

- Who? = Elijah
- What? = he ran
- When? = when he heard that Jezebel still wanted him dead

So, Why?....

### 1) Elijah *reacted* rather than *responded* in faith

- We've read that Elijah was 'afraid' and fear is such a powerful weapon that is used against us
- **False Evidence Appearing Real** – the real issue of fear is that it distorts our perspective of the situation. It provides us with 'False Evidence'
- We then react to situations and issues that aren't real even
- Then we base our judgements and decisions on this false evidence, which then affects our behaviour

*"What a tangled web we weave, when first we begin to deceive"* – we can get into all sorts of mess and get tied up if we allow ourselves to believe the enemy's deceptions.

Fear causes us to react and get our running shoes on and get all fired up and ready to flee – the fight or flight syndrome. We flee rather than getting a hold of the actual truth of the matter and responding with stability and control and taking stock of the situation based on God's word.

Romans 8: 15 tells us *'For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship'* That doesn't mean that we aren't to be wary of a poisonous snake or standing on a train line when a train is hurtling towards us but it tells us that we are not to accept the type of fear which tells you that you can't do something – me preaching, you bringing word of Lord, praying out loud etc.

Elijah reacted to the natural rather than focusing on the supernatural because he was afraid. He looked at the possible negatives that could go wrong rather than building his faith up on the events that had just taken place. If we aren't people who are stood strong in God it can cause us to react in fear, to panic and to run.

The knock on effect of Elijah's fear is that it caused him to sink into a deep depression, certainly when we read in verse 4: *'He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep'*. - these sound like the words of a depressed man.

According to the NHS it is difficult to provide statistics on the exact figures regarding depression as many people struggle along undiagnosed. Some figures however tell us that: 1 in 4 people suffer from some form of depression in their lives, women are twice as likely to suffer than men, however more men commit suicide because of it and 10% of children from as young as 5 suffer from a form of it at some point in their life.

In this chapter, Elijah becomes a classic illustration of how the medical profession describe a depressed person. We find in his thinking, words, and actions many classic symptoms of depression - withdrawal or escape, moodiness, apprehension or fear, self-pity, feelings of worthlessness, loss of hope or confidence, anger, irritability, painful and wrong thinking, and physical exhaustion to name some of the symptoms.

Depression may have a physical cause or an emotional cause or a spiritual cause. Proverbs 17:22 tells us: *'A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones'* - so we can see that the spirit, soul and body are all interlinked and mustn't be treated as separate from each other.

Elijah's cause of depression was a spiritual cause due to his disappointment and his perception of being a failure. The sad thing was that he failed to realise that God was at work regardless of how things appeared to him and instead chose to see failure. We need to remember that as long as we are obedient to God's will

and play our part, then the end result along with the timing of that result are in His hands – we won't always get to see things come to full fruition, but we can't then walk round feeling a sense of failure.

Elijah had an unbiblical self-view. He saw himself as an absolute failure, as worthless, as no better than his fathers who had allowed the nation to fall into its current bad condition. Thinking wrongly about ourselves can be a terrible downer. Galatians tells us '*not to compare ourselves one to another*' because nine times out of 10 when we do this we compare ourselves unfavourably and become harsh on ourselves. Instead we need to base our self-esteem on who we are in Christ.

I mentioned earlier about having to consider pronation (how the foot hits the ground when you run) when I went to buy my running shoe:

- Normal pronation is the right way for the foot to react and just requires a normal semi-circle in the trainer to stabilise the foot – this is how we need to walk as Christians in life
- Things will inevitable come along our paths that potentially can cause us to tip over one way, then the next, veer to the left or to the right, just like a foot when it's running on uneven ground
- But we have to display emotional and spiritually stability and make sure that when we move forwards every step is sure footed and grounded in Christ and that way we won't suffer pain or injury or get taken out along the way
- Spiritual stability is one of the blessings that Christ gave us through salvation and although I recognise that depression is a serious medical condition, and I'm certainly not meaning to be glib about it, for many of us there is much that we can do to protect ourselves from it and to overcome it.
- When I think about the foot in the shoe coming under stress as we run it reminds me of 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 – '*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed*'

Now we understand *why* Elijah ran, let's have a look at the 'Where?'.....

## 2) **Elijah ran to a lonely and isolated place**

Scripture tells us that Elijah fled to Beersheba which is way way to the south. But even that was not far enough, Elijah then left his servant there and went another full day's journey into the desert wilderness where he sought shelter, not in the Almighty, but in a bush. Nowhere in this chapter do we find Elijah calling on the Lord or seeking His direction – wrongly wearing his running shoes he went his own way. Elijah ran down to the desert to hide, and he did so without God's direction and without God as his primary shelter. Earlier on in his life God had directed Elijah to certain places, but he most certainly hadn't directed him here.

Through this we are again reminded that Elijah had a nature just like ours, as often when we are hurt or upset, offended or fed-up and looking at things through the wrong perspective, we react by removing ourselves from other people, including not coming to church, we alienate ourselves. Just as Elijah left his servant to be alone, very often we shut down communication and withdraw into ourselves. We isolate ourselves – this is totally the wrong thing to do.

During the worship last week Pat read a scripture and it struck me how similar the situation that she read about was to the situation here with Elijah, and yet in the scripture Pat read we see the perfect way to deal with the situation – Psalm 63.

Here we find David also in the desert just as Elijah was, he too has fled from those wanting to take his life and yet his response is so so different.

*'O God, you are my God,  
earnestly I seek you;  
my soul thirsts for you,  
my body longs for you,  
in a dry and weary land  
where there is no water*

*I have seen you in the sanctuary*

*and beheld your power and your glory. (So had Elijah, he had seen the Lord all through his life powerfully working the miraculous and especially just before he fled)*

*Because you are my help,*

*I sing in the shadow of your wings.*

*My soul clings to you;*

*your right hand upholds me.*

*They who seek my life will be destroyed;*

*they will go down to the depths of the earth.*

*They will be given over to the sword*

*and become food for jackals.*

*But the king will rejoice in God;*

*all who swear by God's name will praise him,*

*while the mouths of liars will be silenced.*

How different is that response! Elijah's response was – 'I have had enough Lord, take my life' – but here David declares that God will 'be his help' and that 'His right hand will uphold him'. This response also reminds me of Paul and Silas chained up in the prison – their response was to tighten up their gym trainers and declare God's promises. In times of trouble that will save your life every time!

Now we've understood the 'Why?' and the 'Where?', what about the 'How?' How did this finish? How did Elijah turn his situation around? ....

### 3) God restored Elijah

1 Kings 19:4 - "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night.

Psalm 139:7 tells us 'Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?' – the answer to that is nowhere! God's got bigger and better trainers than any of us, and he can run better and faster than us no matter what. And here He is proving that to Elijah.

#### There are five things that God did to restore Elijah:

##### 1) He got practical

The first thing that God did was to feed and nourish his body, Elijah had just had that awesome encounter on Mount Carmel, he'd run 15 miles at the speed of a chariot, and then fled right down to the furthest point of the country he could – he would have been spiritually, physically and emotionally exhausted. I said earlier that there are things we can do to protect ourselves from and to overcome depression – good nutrition, enough sleep and regular exercise all do have a vital part to play, so make sure you give those things priority in your life. Our bodies were designed to run on fuel and like a car, if we aren't treating them properly they will underperform and eventually grind to a halt. You wouldn't lay hands on your car and cast a demon out of it if all it needed was petrol would you!

##### 2) He got factual

The second thing that God did was to get Elijah's mind on the facts of the situation – he wanted him to reflect on what he had done and to straighten out Elijah's perspective of the situation and so he asked him in verse 9: 'Why are you here?' - in fact he asked it him twice. God knows full well the things in our heart and on our minds and so he doesn't really need to ask, but it is important that we actively confess to Him our innermost thoughts and feelings. Often speaking out which we perceive to be true can help us to realize and refocus our perspective and to see that 'False Evidence Appearing Real' actually isn't real at all.

### 3) He got intimate

Thirdly, God knew that what Elijah needed was a personal encounter with Him – an intimate time. Reading from verse 11: *"The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

Elijah had seen God work dramatically and powerfully throughout his life but maybe he hadn't had many quiet one-to-one's with him, and so God chose to speak to him in the gentle whisper. It's easy to come on a Sunday and feel built up by the atmosphere and ride on the waves of other people's passion and enthusiasm, but when Monday morning comes along we find ourselves feeling lost and lonely again. That's when we need to close the door, come into our Father's presence, be honest before Him and listen to the voice that speaks directly and intimately to us, allowing Him to minister to us and heal us.

Elijah finally recognised that – v13 says he *'pulled his cloak over his face'* – that was a sign of humbling himself before God. Elijah allowed himself to be laid bare, honest and open before Him, and it is when we are in that place that God can begin to rebuild us accurately.

### 4) He refocused Elijah's purpose

1 Kings 19:15: *'The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Me holah to succeed you as prophet'*

God commanded Elijah to return home the way he had come – this was very symbolic. In trying to avoid Jezebel it perhaps would have made more sense to take a boat around the outside, or dig a tunnel underneath or invent a helicopter and fly over – anything to avoid Jezebel! But God wasn't having any of that – he was asking Elijah to boldly and confidently pick himself up, put on his running shoes and without fear to go back the same way he had previously fled. Spiritually this was God's instruction to Elijah to progress forwards and to overcome.

God also immediately got Elijah active and involved in ministry again by asking him to do certain things once he had returned. In doing so God was reinstating purpose in Elijah's life and reaffirming to Elijah that he wasn't the 'worthless wreck' that he had considered himself to have been, but that he was still very much needed in God's purposes.

### 5) He declared Elijah's legacy

In the verse we have just read it says *'and anoint Elisha to succeed you as prophet.'* God not only provided Elijah with a companion but he was the person to whom Elijah would leave his legacy. Declaring Elijah's legacy gave him a future.

### Conclusion

God is asking us **'Are you wearing the right type of trainer?'** and we've seen instances in Elijah's life where he needed to be wearing his gym trainer and where he needed to wear his running trainer. Reading from Ephesians 6 it says:

*'Put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then (with your gym trainers on), with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with (your running trainers and) the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.'*

Both types of shoes are needed for our journey as both give us different dynamics, with different strengths and weaknesses

Do you remember what the similarity is about these two trainers?

Both were designed for activity - when you are wearing either shoe all of your cylinders should be fired up, your blood is pounding, you feel alive and ready for action. As long as we find ourselves postured this way, ready, willing and obedient to God, He will guide us as to which shoe to wear at which time. Let's get ready and ensure that our 'spiritual socks' are pulled up, so that we can quickly put on whichever trainer God requires of us at this time.