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“Never Say Die”

I was born in 1993. The only reason I mention this is because despite not spending a single second of my life in the 80’s I absolutely love that decade. The fact that I wasn’t alive for this decade has made it incredibly easy for me to romanticize this time. Bands from the 80’s such as Sonic Youth and The Clash have become sound tracks to my life. But 80’s movies, that is what I really like about that decade.

In fact one of my all time favorite movies comes from the 1980’s. The Goonies. A classic 1980’s coming of age story that follows a group of middle school and high school age friends who live in a town in the Pacific northwest called Astoria. They get their name from the neighborhood they live in Called the Goondocks.

In the movie a rich business tycoon plans to buy to Goondocks and tear it down in his latest business venture which leads the Goonies on an adventure to save their homes. There is a local legend in Astoria that a pirate named One Eyed Willy used a cave near their community to hide his treasure and one day the Goonies find a treasure map that proves to them that this isn’t just a legend. So the Goonies set out to find treasure leading them to a network of caves filled with booby traps and all sorts of danger.

Each of the Goonies has their own unique character qualities that allow them to over come these obstacless. You have a boy nicknamed “Mouth” whose witty back talk and street smarts not only saves the

Goonies from problems but also causes it. You have the immature Dada who found himself in Astoria when his parents emigrated from China.

Then there is Mikey, the leader of the Goonies who coined the phrase “Goonies never say Die!” and he leads the group with his charisma and passion, uplifting the Goonies despite the hardship they are facing.

The Goonie I want to focus on is a chubby and clumsy kid named Chunk gets kidnapped by a trio of bank robbers named the Fratellis. They cross-examine him about the location of a treasure trove, and he doesn’t know exactly what they want. They start screaming at him, “tell us everything!” And Chunk starts confessing every sin that he can think of. *“Everything. OK! I’ll talk! In third grade, I cheated on my history exam. In fourth grade, I stole my uncle Max’s toupee and I glued it on my face when I was Moses in my Hebrew School play. In fifth grade, I knocked my sister Edie down the stairs and I blamed it on the dog... When my mom sent me to the summer camp for fat kids and then they served lunch I got nuts and I pigged out and they kicked me out... But the worst thing I ever done – I mixed a pot of fake puke at home and then I went to this movie theater, hid the puke in my jacket, climbed up to the balcony and then, t-t-then, I made a noise like this: hua-hua-hua-huaaaaaaaa – and then I dumped it over the side, all over the people in the audience. And then, this was horrible, all the people started getting sick and throwing up all over each other. I never felt so bad in my entire life.”*

Chunk's perspective on everything is purely negative. He doesn't see the *good* in his past, only the times that he failed. It's one of those character traits that too many of us share. Rather than rose-colored glasses, we have on too-tight, negative spectacles. Today's hero Elijah is really no different.

We pick up the story of Elijah after his righteous victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. He gave the idol worshippers an opportunity to worship their god with a divine intervention, and they received no response. But when Elijah worshiped our God, holy fire rained down and Elijah's challenge resulted in the conversion of thousands of Israelites. Elijah was vindicated, victorious, even heroic. But in every political clash, there's always fallout, right?

The queen Jezebel, who had corrupted the king of Israel and called the nation to worship idols, is enraged that Elijah had defeated her prophets. So she sent word to him that she had placed a death penalty on his head and that he had twenty-four hours to live. It wasn't that she simply ordered his execution, she made sure he *knew* that death was headed his way. She wanted him to experience fear. And it worked.

Elijah did what any terrified person would do in that situation: he ran. Elijah feared that somehow God would not protect him even after he'd been obedient. So in the middle of the wilderness, abandoned and alone, he prayed that God would just kill him. Elijah was emotionally,

mentally, and even spiritually exhausted, and rather than turn to the refuge of great strength, he was ready to give up.

Before you think I'm being too hard on Elijah, hear me say this: it's what we're inclined to do in situations like this. Fight or flight. And when our strength gives out, we tend to give up.

But an angel woke Elijah up, and told him to eat. A miraculous fire had appeared, and bread was baking next to a jar of water. So he ate, and went back to sleep.

A second time, the angel of the Lord woke him, and told him to eat. So he ate and drank again, and set out for the mountain of God which was forty days away. When he arrived, he spent the night in a cave, and God appeared to him.

Even though *Elijah* had given up on God, *God* refused to give up on Elijah. (Isn't that good news? That even when we've exhausted all of our understandings of God and God's plan, even when we figure that there's no hope left in the wideness of God's mercy for *us*, God shows up and says, "I'm not finished with you yet"?)

So God and Elijah have a come-to-Jesus moment, even though the phrase won't be valid for another few hundred years.

God doesn't really need to know the answer. But rather than showing up and blasting Elijah with the "how dare you?" questions, God is letting Elijah get to this on his own.

"What are you doing here, Elijah?" asked God.

Elijah replied, "I have done everything you asked me to do. And the people have rejected everything you've taught, and killed all of the prophets, except for me!"

Now, we know that's not completely true, right? We know that God's miraculous intervention just resulted in the conversion of thousands of people, and we know that God had watched Elijah throughout his mission to speak the word of God. But God doesn't really engage in Elijah's pity party; he doesn't argue with Elijah, or deal directly with Elijah's depressed state.

I wonder how often we complain about the way we're treated for doing right. Galatians 6:9 urges us to "never get tired of doing good," but sometimes our hearts lack the strength to keep doing it on our own. Again, this isn't a new world problem!

Elijah isn't the first or the last man of God to feel abandoned and alone, or to think that they had failed absolutely. Half of David's Psalms are

from the depths of despair; Jeremiah was even thrown into the pit of a well. But God doesn't hand out tissues or even tell Elijah to buck up.

Instead, God tells Elijah to go out of the cliff onto the mountain into the presence of God. A wind tore the mountains apart, with rocks shattering everywhere. Next came an earthquake, and then a fire. But God wasn't present in any of those three, fierce natural elements. And then Elijah experienced God as a gentle whisper, who told him to anoint a new king, to anoint a successor to be the next prophet, and to recognize that there were seven thousand men in Israel (not counting women and children) who had not given into idol worship, who were still loyal to God.

In Elijah's darkest moment, God showed up, first as a miraculous wind, earthquake, and fire, and then the subtle encouragement he needed to complete his mission. It's funny how darkest moments seem to come just after high and holy moments, or right before them. How to get through to where we're supposed to be, we have to experience the valley on the way to the mountain. How when we're pushing forward to what we're supposed to be, we experience the most pushback, the most resistance, and sometimes, it's internal!

Are you there right now? Have you become tired while doing good, or felt that there is no hope in the midst of the present darkness? Are you experiencing the highs of a breakthrough moment, but exhausted by the

effort? I hope that you will turn boldly to the God of the universe and be real about where you are.

See Goonies never say die and neither does God, and God is not done with you yet.

I wonder what it would look like if we pushed past the depression, the valley, the wilderness into the mountainside where God meets us. I wonder what it would look like if we trusted in the darkness that the light was just around the corner, if we embraced the darkness as a temporary spot and the light as the truth, if we would be more effective in being who God wants us to be. Would we save ourselves the aggravation of trusting in ourselves and instead put our efforts in fully relying on God.

What do you need to give up to God today? What are you holding onto and trying to control on your own? Is it work-related, or family-related? Is it about your time or your money? Is it something you've struggled with secretly and haven't been able to tell anyone else about? Let it go, and let God.

Too often we look back at our lives and we only see the low spots. We tend to have negative 20/20 vision. We recognize where we went wrong, where we messed up, where life dealt us a blow. We fail to see the ways that God moved or carried us through the roughest parts, the ways that

others were there for us, that we weren't alone. It takes practice to focus on the positive, on the good, on the JOY. It takes living in the here and now, instead of reflecting on the past so much until we live in it.

We have great opportunities in front of us. We have conferences like General Assembly where we look to the ways that God is working in our church; our Halloween Carnival and Spaghetti Supper events are opportunities for us to invite our friends and the neighbors into our church for fellowship. And along the way, we have our Bible studies and Sunday School classes to examine the Scripture, to share of our lives, and to pray for God's guidance in the ways that he might use us.

When Elijah follows up on God's plan for him, he tracks down Elisha in I Kings 19:19-21: *“Elisha was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. 20 Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. ‘Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,’ he said, ‘and then I will come with you.’ Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.”*

Elisha got it. He wasn't going back to his family; he wasn't going to be a farmer again. The yoke, the oxen, the equipment for plowing— all of those things were dead weight once he became Elijah's apprentice.

To move forward, to follow in Elijah's footsteps, Elisha had to let his past go, and embrace a new future. He had to surrender the expectations that he'd had as a farmer, as a son. He was now a mentee, and a prophet. He was called by God to something new.

It's the same thing that the first twelve disciples went through, that Paul went through (he even got a new name!) And it's the same thing we go through when we recognize that we're too focused on ourselves, and the things that other people tell us are important. We've got to cut the cords to our doubts and our fears, and embrace the present opportunities that God has to offer us. God wants us to know that our future is bright in *his* plan, that God's future is so much more important than our past. God shows us the fire, the earthquake, and the wind, but God is in the whisper if we will only listen to what he has to say.

God is not finished with us yet.