

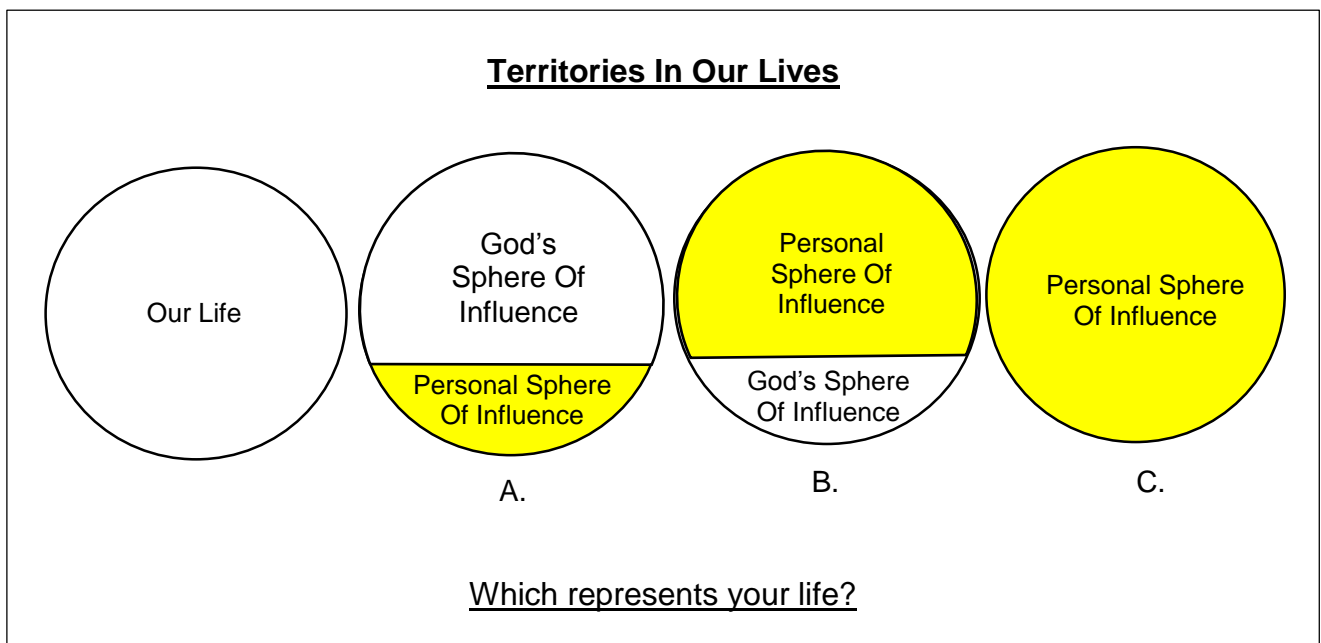
Enlarging Your Territory of Faith

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Scripture ref: 1 Kings 17

“Territories” in our lives

- Consciously or unconsciously, we all have the habit of carving out “territories” in our lives.
 - where we decide what areas of our lives we want “autonomy” and
 - which areas of our lives we’re prepared to surrender to God.



- The problem with most of us is that: It is not that we don't trust God, it is how much do we trust God.
 - we all trust God. Problem: how much are we prepared to let God control our lives.

a) Our Personal Territories

- So, we carve out “territories” (“spheres of influence”) in our lives.
 - where we “reserve” certain areas for ourselves
 - we put up “invisible signs”, tell God, “Please Keep Out”.
- So we put up invisible “Do Not Interfere” signs in matters relating to;

- our finances (“please don’t touch my money. I worked very hard for it, I’ll tithe when I can”).
 - our “relationship life” (“please don’t tell me to marry only a Christian man, because right now, I’m so in love with this non-Christian guy”).
 - our “career” (“my career very important to me, so please let me decide what is good for me. It’s my life”).
 - our “business” (“please don’t tell me how to conduct my business. Giving bribes the norm in my business in that country. Surely God understand. Otherwise, how to do survive?”)
- Major decisions concerning myself, let me decide.

b) God’s Territories

- Our health (when I’m not well, or suffering from critical illness, please come and heal me, quickly).
- Our troubles (things don’t work out, come and fix it for me) etc

c) “Personal sphere of influence” vs “God’s sphere of influence”.

- So we carve out our “personal sphere of influence” vs “God’s sphere of influence”.
- As our personal “sphere of influence” grows larger
 - God’s sphere of influence grows smaller
- Soon God may be edged out of your life
 - having no say (except when you are in trouble).
- Is that the life you want?

Expanding God’s Sphere of Influence

- On the other hand, what happens if you allow God’s ‘sphere of influence’ to expand?
- That’s where you embark the amazing discovery of what God can do in your life.

- Let's examine scriptures and look at good example of great prophet who was called upon to perform a great miracle of God
 - to prove God Jehovah is the true God.
- The man we're talking about is Prophet Elijah.

How God Enlarged Elijah's Territory Of Faith

Chap.17: How God prepared Elijah for Battle at Mt.Carmel

- We are all familiar with 1 Kings 18 (where Elijah triumphed over the 400 false prophets at Mt.Carmel).
- So we skip Chap.17 to go to Chap.18 because it's more exciting.
- Is that how you read it? If you do, then you'll miss a very crucial chapter.
 - because Chap.17 events is the precursor to Chap.18.
 - they're both closely connected. If you skip Chap.17, you'll not fully appreciate Chap.18
- God did not just tell Elijah: "Tomorrow, go and fight the false prophet at Mt.Carmel".
- God had to prepare Elijah for this "mother of all battles".
 - it was going to be bloody. Many will be killed.
- Where do you think Elijah got the confidence from when he called upon God Jehovah to rain fire from the sky?
- What if God did not answer him?
 - he would be slaughtered into pieces.
- That confidence came from Chap.17.
- 3 miracles occurred in Chap.17 that God used to prepare Elijah for the "mother of all battles" in chap.18.
- Let's take a closer look at Chap.17 and see what actually happened.

3 Miracles In Chapter 17

(i) 1st Miracle: Miraculous feeding by Ravens

a) Background

- Israel was experiencing a very severe drought because God was punishing Israel for its terrible sins under King Ahab (a bad King).
- Soon almost the whole of Israel dried up.
- God told Elijah to go to a brook at Kerith
 - where he will get enough water to drink
 - God will provide him food. How? Ravens will feed him
- Ravens? Whoever heard of ravens feeding people?
 - ravens don't feed people, they steal food from people.
 - they're pests, they're dirty, they spread diseases.
- If you were Elijah, would you go to the Kerith brook?
- Elijah went to the brook in Kerith and miraculously ravens came daily to feed him – as God said.

Lesson learned

(i) God may use unlikely source of help to help us in our need.

- Some of us may be experiencing a “drought period” in our lives.
 - I'm going through one now. Suddenly, my work dried up.
- God used ravens to provide his needs in a drought
 - a very unlikely source of help for a man in hunger.
- The “ravens” that God may use to help you unexpectedly could be
 - someone you did not expect.
 - something you did not expect.
 - some situation you did not expect. } to deliver you
- Whatever the source, I know God will provide.

(ii) 2nd Miracle: Miraculous Feeding Of Dying Widow

a) Background

- Drought got worse, brook at Kerith dried up.
- God told Elijah to leave Kerith to go to Zarephath
 - where a widow will feed him
- If you're facing starvation, where do you go to look for food?
 - rich man's house. Not a widow's house.
 - widows (by definition in OT) are poor, husbands (bread winner) died.
- If you were Elijah, would you go to Zarephath?

b) Encounter with widow at Zarephath city gate.

- Anyway, Elijah went to Zarephath (as instructed by God)
 - found a widow at the city gate gathering sticks.
 - how did Elijah know this was the right widow? God never mentioned her name.
- Elijah asked the widow for a drink
 - grudgingly she might have agreed ("why can't he get his own water?")
 - maybe it's the custom to be hospitable to visitors.
- As she was heading towards her hut, Elijah decided to change the menu
 - "Oh, can you also give me a piece of bread?"
- She turned around and told Elijah:
 - "I was just gathering some sticks (you saw me, right?) to cook the last meal for myself and my son. We will eat and die!"
- Elijah found out 2 things about the widow
 - (i) she had no more food. ("I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl (jar) and a little oil in the jar (jug)"). (v.10)

- can you imagine each day this poor widow went to her bare, tiny kitchen, only to see her flour and oil dwindling.
- on the day Elijah visited her, she had the last handful of flour in the bowl and just a few drops of oil in her jar left to cook her last meal
- she had, literally, “scrapped the bottom of the barrel”!
- In other words, it was a very dire situation. A crisis. Are you going through such a crisis?

Bad timing or perfect timing?

- The widow might have told Elijah: “If only you came earlier a few weeks ago. Maybe I could have baked you a piece of bread. But not today. Sorry, I cannot sacrifice my last dying meal (with my son) for you”.
- So, did God get His timing wrong?
- From the widow’s perspective: the timing was bad.
- From God’s perspective: It was the perfect timing for God to work His miracle.
- God’s timing never wrong. Never too early or too late.

(ii) 2 mouths to feed (widow & son).

- From widow’s perspective, she saw Elijah as someone who had come to deprive her & her son their last meal.
- Hardly did she know that God had sent Elijah to save her and her son from starvation.
- Elijah said to the widow: “Don’t worry, go ahead and cook that last meal. But bake that bread first (wise guy). Afterwards, there will be enough food for you and your son”.
- God had told Elijah (now he’s telling her):

“There will always plenty of flour and oil left in your container until the time when the Lord sends rain and crops grow again” (ie. when drought ends)

- That was a statement made in faith.

c) The Miracle

- As the widow obeyed Elijah and started to bake the bread
 - all 3 of them had a full meal.
- Next day she found to her amazement, there was fresh flour in the bowl and oil in the jug.
- They never seemed to run out!
- There was always enough flour and oil for the next day.
- This went on for days until the rain came (as Elijah said).

d) Effect of the Miracle

- Q: What do you think was going on in: -
 - the minds of the widow & her son?
 - the mind of Elijah?
- In the end: who fed who?
 - Elijah fed the widow & her son? Or
 - the widow fed Elijah?
- | |
|------------------------------|
| Answer: God fed both of them |
|------------------------------|
- The miraculous feeding was for the benefit of both the widow & her son and Elijah as well (as we shall see later).

Lesson learned

- Are you also facing a "Zarephath widow" situation?
 - you're scrapped to "bottom of your barrel". There's almost nothing left?
- I am experiencing that myself. What do you do?
- * Ask God to send his "Elijah" to provide my needs.

(iii)3rd Miracle: Miraculous Resurrection Of Widow's Dead Son

a) Death of widow's son

- Just as everything was going so well, disaster struck!
- Suddenly the widow's son died.
- The widow accused Elijah of bringing bad luck to her.

"O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to punish my sins by killing my son" (v.18)

- Elijah had no reply. He asked her to hand over the dead son to him.
- He took the body to the upper room where he had been sleeping and laid the corpse on his bed.
- He stretched himself upon the dead child 3 times and prayed:

"O Lord my God, I pray You let this child's life return to him". (v.21)

- What an audacious prayer.

"The Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived". (v.22)

b) Elijah resurrected widow's son

- A great tragedy calls for a great miracle.
- Elijah had witnessed 2 miracles so far.
 - how God fed him using ravens.
 - how God miraculously used him to multiply the widow's food supply.
- Elijah was about to witness a miracle that was far greater than the 2 previous miracles.
- God heard Elijah's plea and God used Elijah to bring the dead boy to life again. The widow said to Elijah

"Now I know for sure, you are a man of God, and that the Lord truly speaks through you". (v.24)

- With this simple, utterance, the widow had affirmed 2 truths about Elijah.
 - 1st: He was a man of God (ie. God had chosen him).
 - 2nd: God would speak through Elijah
- Through this 3rd miracle, Elijah knew for sure
 - if God can resurrect a dead person to life, He can do anything.
- More importantly, it sealed that intimate relationship between God and Elijah.
 - When Elijah call upon God, He will act!
- Now you know where Elijah got his confidence from?

Summary: How God Enlarged Elijah's Territory Of Faith

- As each miracle unfolded before Elijah, it did something to him inside.
- His trust in God grew.
 - his confidence in God grew.
 - his faith in God grew.
 - his trust in God grew.
 - his relationship with God grew.
- By the time Elijah stepped on to the foot of Mt.Carmel.
 - he knew for sure that when he called upon God to rain fire to demonstrate He is the true God.
 - God will act according to his call.
- So the battle at Mt.Carmel was already won
 - before Elijah set foot on Mt.Carmel.
- Imagine, if Elijah had not obeyed God to go to Kerith and Zarephath, he would have missed out God's demonstration of His power of who He is and what he could do through Elijah, His chosen vessel.
- By trusting and obeying God, Elijah's "territory of faith" expanded to become one of the greatest prophets through eternity.

Closing

How Do I Enlarge My “Territory Of Faith”?

I'll share with you how God helped me to enlarge my “territory of faith” (still learning).

(i) Let God have a bigger say in my life.

- In the past – I used to move ahead of God.
 - means: I do what I want to do and expect God to follow me (ie. rubber-stamp my plans).
- Often end in disappointment or disaster.

Proverbs 16:9

“In his heart a man plans, but the Lord directs his steps”

- Now: I seek “God’s clearance” before I move.
- Means: before I plunge into something I think it’s a good idea
 - I hold back and ask God: “Is this your will for me?”
 - if not, it’s OK. I’ll not pursue it.
- I learn to give in to God more.
- In that way, my “territory of faith” grows.
- How do I know God’s will for me?
 - it’s not an exact science (you don’t always get it right).
 - it’s not a formula (no guarantee for success).
- It’s from God’s Word (that’s why you have to spend time reading God’s Word).
 - from God’s prompting from Holy Spirit (deep quiet conviction in your heart). Often, God speaks in a still small voice (as Elijah found out in Chap.19).
- All these can only come from 1 thing.
 - your daily walk with God.

- How's your daily walk with God?
 - do you spend time with God?
 - do you spend time in prayer?
 - do you spend time reading God's Word?
 - do you seek counsel from other Christians (preferably spiritual ones)?

Summary

- As you lead a God-led life, God's "sphere of influence" in your life begins to grow and dominate your life.
- End-result: you find that God can, and will do more things in your life.
- You no longer panic so easily when you face crisis.
 - you become a calmer person.
- As you begin to seek God's guidance, you begin to discover exciting things you can do.
 - because you're no longer relying on yourself but God.
 - God will equip you and enable you to do things you never thought you could do.
- The list is endless.

Enlarging my "territory of faith" is all about:

- My trust in God.
- My belief in what God can do.
- My confidence in God.
- My relationship with God.

(ii)As you enlarge your "territory of faith", God will change you.

- The amazing thing about "pursuit of enlarging of territory of faith" is that God will change your life.
 - God begin to change your character.

- This should not surprise us because when you let God have a bigger sphere of influence in your life.
 - the Holy Spirit begins to dominate your life.
- When the Holy Spirit begins to dominate your life, you begin to bear more of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Fruit of The Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22)

(i) Love

- You begin to love people more (including people you never quite like before).

(ii) Joy

- You experience quiet inner joy even though things may not be all rosy.

(iii) Peace

- You learn to experience inner peace in the midst of a storm because you learn not to rely on yourself but God and His Word.

(iv) Patience

- As you let God lead your life, you learn to be more patient in your dealings with others. You become more tolerant of people. Don't easily lose your temper.

(v) Kindness

- You begin to be a kinder person and you begin to show acts of kindness to others.

(vi) Goodness

- The Holy Spirit teaches you to do good to others.

(vii) Faithfulness

- As the Holy Spirit begin to dominate your life, your faith in God will naturally grow. You begin to rely less on yourself but on God.

(viii) Gentleness

- You learn to be a more gentle person, no longer the abrasive or impatient person you once were. One of the hallmarks of great Christians I've met, these're 1 thing in common: gentleness.

(ix) Self-control

- When you begin to experience gentleness, you begin to have more self-control over yourself. You become a calmer person. You don't simply react.

- It takes a life-time to experience all these.

Psalm 40:4 “Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust”.

- Do you realize something happens when you trust in God?
- God says: “Each time you put your trust in me, I bless you”.
- So each time we trust God for each situation, He blesses us.
- So accumulatively, it all adds up. As you walk closer with God, a lot of blessings!
- In other words, when you trust God, your ‘territory of faith’ begins to expand.
- I discover in my life, as I walk with God, He sees me through all sorts of challenges
- **The more I trust God, the more I know He can be trusted.**

Isaiah 30:18 “For the Lord is a faithful God: Blessed are those who wait for Him”.

- Why does the bible always talk about “waiting upon the Lord”?
- When you wait upon the Lord, 2 things happen
 - you give God more space to do His work in your life.
 - you allow God to demonstrate His power in your life (which you may otherwise miss).
- So when you wait upon the Lord, you also enlarge upon territories of faith.
- You’ll discover that: **the more I trust God, the more I know He can be trusted.**