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1 Kings 19

“God help, I’m Depressed”

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In [1 Kings 18](#), Elijah was literally and figuratively having a mountaintop experience. He had witnessed God’s awesome display of power on Mt. Carmel when the sacrifice he made was consumed, including the water in the trough around the sacrifice, as well as the rocks surrounding the sacrifice! He had ordered the slaughter of the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, which caused a revival. He had witnessed the turning of the people, away from pagan idols, and to God. And finally, he had witnessed the way God brought an end to the 3 ½ year drought, which was a judgment from God concerning their idolatry.

It’s not unreasonable to think that someone who had been an eyewitness and a participant in all of these things would be on cloud nine. But that’s not the case with Elijah, who, both literally and figuratively, went approximately 100 miles south, from the mountaintop of Mt. Carmel to Beersheba, in the desert of Judea. We’re left to wonder why it is that Elijah was so depressed that he would pray and ask the Lord to end his life?

In this study we’ll learn how Elijah suffered emotionally, spiritually, and physically. We’ll also look at the ways the Lord ministered to him and helped him in a time of depression, discouragement, and despair, and we can apply these lessons and understand more about the ways the Lord wants to minister to us.

A Myth In The Church

1. There are many who believe that Christians aren’t supposed to feel down or gloomy, and a depressed Christian is an oxymoron.

2. There are many who believe that Christians should always be “chipper” and happy, because, after all, knowing the Good News that Jesus saves, there’s just no reason to not be happy all the time.
3. This kind of thinking has become a doctrine among many TV preachers, and in many churches.
4. The truth is that good, godly people can become depressed or go through seasons of discouragement from time to time.
5. It’s also true that wonderful Christian people, who have a deep relationship with the Lord and a love for the Lord, can experience extended seasons of discouragement.
6. The truth is that God is not just the God of Mt. Carmel, but he’s also the God of the Jezreel Valley.

Historical Background

7. King Ahab, of whom the Bible tells us there was none more wicked and evil than he, allowed the pagan influence of his wife, Jezebel, to cause the people of Israel, as well as himself, to sin against God.
8. Jezebel was a Sidonian, which is modern-day Lebanon, and her father was a pagan priest to Asherah,¹ named Ethbaal.
9. Jezebel learned idolatry and pagan worship in her home, and it should have been the case that Ahab would not have married her.
10. Jezebel raised up these 850 pagan prophets.
 - a. **1 Kings 18:19** - *“... the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”*
 - i. What this means is that Jezebel took care of them, financed them, and fed them.
11. Now that the nation has turned to God and was in the process of starting a time of revival, everyone is happy, with the exception being Jezebel.
12. **1 Kings 19:1-2** - *“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*

¹ Asherah was the female god of fertility, as well as the female counterpart to Baal.

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.' ”

13. Her reaction and the “hit” she puts on caused Elijah to be afraid, and he “*ran for his life,*” according to [1 Kings 19:3](#).

Elijah Was Hit Emotionally

14. Elijah’s fear wasn’t just paranoia, it was a genuine fear because Jezebel’s men were on their way to kill him.
15. Pastor Gary said that he was comforted by the fact that this account helped him understand that even giants of the faith like Elijah can be afraid.
16. There are degrees of fear, and not all fear is bad, however, some fears can be debilitating because there can be a link between anxiety and depression.
17. [1 John 4:18](#) - “... *perfect love drives out fear.*”
18. [2 Timothy 1:7](#) - “*God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*” (KJV)
19. These Scriptures are true, but sometimes the battle against fear can be a life-long challenge of clinging for dear life to Bible verses like these.

Elijah Was Hit Spiritually

20. [1 Kings 19:4b](#) - “ ‘*I have had enough, Lord,*’ he said. ‘*Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.*’ ”
21. Pastor Gary said it had been his experience that oftentimes when a person experiences the high of being used by God, there can be a time that follows of unexplained discouragement.
22. This “Elijah Effect,” which is what Pastor Gary calls it, is seen in Elijah’s experience when he “crashes” and is convinced that what he had done for the Lord was worthless.
23. These feelings come as a direct result of two things:
- a. When we pour ourselves out spiritually, we are left spiritually empty, and until the Lord fills us up again, that emptiness feels like discouragement.

- b. There is an element of “spiritual warfare” involved, because Satan hates it when we are used by the Lord, so he will often come against us to discourage us.
24. One of the things Satan does to discourage us is to exploit a sense of unworthiness and inadequacy, which makes us feel like a failure, which is why Elijah said that he was no better than his ancestors.

Elijah Was Hit Physically

25. **1 Kings 19:5-6** - *“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.”*
26. Another contributing factor to Elijah’s discouragement was physical exhaustion.
- a. He needed food and rest, so God sent an angel to attend to his physical needs.
27. As simple and as practical as this may sound, it’s a fact that getting proper rest and eating a healthy diet is good medicine for discouragement.
28. If you find yourself in a season of despair or discouragement, you’ll be in good company, because not only did Elijah find himself there; so did many others, including:
- a. Job - **Job 3:11** - *“Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?”*
 - b. Hannah - **1 Samuel 1:16** - *“... I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”*
 - c. Jonah - **Jonah 4:3** - *“Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”*
 - d. David - **Psalms 6:6-7** - *“I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow...”*
 - e. David - **Psalms 13:2a** - *“How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?”*
 - f. David - **Psalms 25:16** - *“Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.”*
 - g. Paul - **2 Corinthians 1:8** - *“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We*

were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life."

29. A list of other prominent Christians who've suffered from depression would include:

- a. Martin Luther – 16th Century Reformer – Martin Luther endured many instances of depression, with which he suffered most of his life. He wrote about it often, using terms like melancholy, heaviness, depression, dejection of spirit, being downcast, sad, or disheartened, to describe what he was experiencing.
- b. Charles H. Spurgeon – 19th Century Pastor/Preacher – Spurgeon's battle started in 1858, when he was 24 years old. He would say of that time: "My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for." He struggled with "causeless depression" his whole life. He wrote about the "shapeless, indefinable, yet all-beclouding hopelessness, cannot be reasoned with," because this type of depression was as difficult as fighting the mist.

30. Pastor Gary said there is another component to all depression and discouragement that isn't necessarily reflected in this account, but it's worth mentioning.

- a. The brain is a highly complex organ, and there are chemicals like serotonin, endorphins, dopamine, etc., which can be out of balance, as well as neurons and neurotransmitters, which sometimes misfire, all of which can contribute to depression that might need medical attention.
- b. No one should feel ashamed or embarrassed about situations like these, because they are no different than someone having the need to take insulin injections because their pancreas doesn't produce enough insulin.
- c. Pastor Gary said that while it's true that we live in an over-medicated society, there are some people who are medicated but don't need to be, and there are some who aren't medicated and need to be and these people should seek medical help.
- d. Pastor Gary concluded his remarks by saying that even though there may be a need for medication, people shouldn't let a pill be their sole source of help, because, the Lord is our healer and we need to turn to him for help in times of trouble.

The Rest Of The Story

31. Elijah "*prayed that he might die,*" but God's answer was a resounding, "No!"

32. The fact is that God opposed his request so much that God saw to it that Elijah would not experience physical death, but be taken alive to heaven in a chariot of fire!
33. The Lord ministered to Elijah in his despair, and strengthened by the food, he went to Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai), where God met with him.
34. **1 Kings 19:11-13** - *"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 ["still small voice" - KJV]. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave."*
35. The presence of the Lord was not in the spectacular!
36. Pastor Gary said he believes God was saying to Elijah, "I am nearer to you than you think. Don't look for me in the spectacular; you will find me most in the quiet times, when you just come before me and listen for that still small voice to comfort and encourage you."
37. There really is no substitute for sitting at the feet of Jesus and having quiet time with him, especially when we are discouraged and in despair.
38. We would do well to listen to his gentle whisper, the still small voice that says, "I love you, and everything's going to be okay."
39. David, in **Psalm 61:1-4**, wrote: *"Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I will call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings."*
- a. KJV - *"Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings."*
40. God is still God when we we're on the mountaintop, as well as when we're in the valley.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [1 Kings 18:39-40](#) and [19:1-5](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Share examples of conversations, sermons, books you've read, etc., when the myth that Christians are never supposed to be discouraged or depressed is championed.
4. Are there good, godly people you've known who've struggled with these issues?
5. How has the Lord ministered to them and helped them daily cope with these problems?
6. How did the Lord bring emotional, spiritual, and physical healing?
7. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about the ways the Lord has been evident in their life, both on the mountaintop and in the valley?
8. How has the Lord helped you in times when you had a genuine fear, like Elijah's when he learned that Jezebel had put out a "contract" on his life?
9. Read and discuss [1 John 4:18](#) and [2 Timothy 1:7](#).
10. Share examples of times when you've poured yourself out in ministry for the Lord, only to find that you were left spiritually empty and that emptiness felt like discouragement.
11. How have you been aware of the fact that you're in a time spiritual warfare?
12. How did the Lord help you to win the victory?
13. Do you find that when you're physically drained you are more susceptible to discouragement, etc.?
14. Review the list of people mentioned in the Bible who have gone through seasons of despair or discouragement. (See #28 and #29 above)
15. Why do you think the Lord allows us to go through seasons of discouragement?

16. How does the example of Elijah fit within the framework of the bad theology that God always wants us to be healthy, happy, and wealthy?
17. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments in #36 above.
18. Read and discuss [Psalm 61:1-4](#).
19. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: turn to the Lord for help in times of trouble, despair, discouragement, and depression; remember that God is the God of the mountaintop experiences and the valley experiences, too; sit at the feet of the Lord and listen to his gentle voice, when he whispers, "I love you, and everything's going to be okay."

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).