

Sunday 9th July 2023.

Cared for or Depressed – the story of Elijah.

Scripture: 1 King 19:3-15



Depression is the common cold of our emotions. Eventually it touches everyone — even God’s people. Does that surprise you?

The word depressed is a common everyday word. People might say: “I am depressed” when in fact they mean: “I am sad or fed up or frustrated.” These ups and downs of life are common and normal. Most people recover quite quickly. True depression means having a low mood and other symptoms, such as loss of enjoyment, low energy, wanting to hide yourself away or sleep all day, each day for at least two weeks. It is difficult to think positively about the future, it can disrupt sleep, weight, and appetite.

The scripture we just read reveals that Elijah experienced the same weaknesses, frailties, and emotions as the rest of us and he became depressed. You may think this strange as Elijah had just experienced two great spiritual victories – the defeat of the prophets of Baal and the answered prayer for rain.

Often discouragement sets in after great spiritual experiences, especially those requiring physical effort or involving great emotions.

So how did Elijah handle the news that Queen Jezebel was out to kill him? He ran and ran and ran. He ran 27 kilometres, running ahead of a chariot and then fleeing for another 160 kilometres – boy anyone would be exhausted! He then lay down under a bush and cried out to God saying: “I’ve had it Lord, take my life, I am no better than my ancestors.”

Have you ever become so depressed that you just wanted to hide away, withdraw, see no-one? That you felt hopeless and like you couldn’t go on?

When we use up our physical energy, we become exhausted.

When we use up our emotional energy, we become depressed.

When we ignore our spiritual self, we feel totally hopeless.

Elijah fell asleep – physically, emotionally, and spiritually drained. What did the Lord do? He let him sleep. After a time, the Lord sent an angel who prepared a meal for Elijah, awakened him, and gave him food to eat and water to drink. Then he slept again. Once more the angel awoke him and fed him in preparation for a journey to Mt. Horeb.

Strengthened by the food, Elijah finally reached his destination, just another 241 kilometres away to the south. I am exhausted just reading all this. He kept running away from his situation.

Did that alter his despair and depression – running further away?

No, it didn’t. He felt completely alone, he sat down in a dark and dingy cave and wrapped himself up in self-pity.

God asked him, “Elijah, what are you doing here? Elijah basically said to God – I have worked hard to teach the people about you,

but they have disowned you. And now, there is only me left, so what's the use. Elijah is singing the blues. He feels he has done his best for God, and it has been to no avail, so he has a pity party. All of us can feel ourselves being pulled down throughout life.

What did God do? He didn't berate Elijah and say: Prophets shouldn't talk like that. He didn't make Elijah feel guilty for his feelings, He accepted him and listened to him. Elijah thought he was the only one left. Lonely and discouraged he forgot that others had remained faithful during the nation's wickedness.

When you are tempted to think that you are the only one remaining faithful to the task, don't stop to feel sorry for yourself. Self-pity will dilute the good you are doing. Be assured that even if you feel like the only one struggling – you are not and you are not alone. God is always with you.

And after God listened as Elijah poured out his feelings of anger, bitterness and self-pity, God revealed Himself to him. God didn't reveal Himself only in powerful, miraculous ways. Looking for God in something big may lead you to miss Him, because He is often found gently whispering in the quietness of a humbled heart.

Step back from the noise and activity of your busy life and listen humbly and quietly for His guidance. It may come when you least expect it. We need to keep life in perspective. And Elijah needed not only a new perspective of God, but also himself.

Elijah's depression wasn't bound up in any one cause. Rather, it stemmed from several things. Here are the four factors:

The first is fear. Elijah was frightened by the threats of Jezebel. Fear is almost always a factor in depression. Many times, like Elijah, we become afraid of failure, of loneliness, of not getting a job completed, of not making it through circumstances and not having our life go the way we would like it to.

The second is failure. Elijah held a negative opinion about himself. He felt he wasn't successful enough in turning the people back to God. It's easy to think: "I'm no good. I'm incompetent. God made a mistake when He made me."

The third is fatigue. Elijah was emotionally drained and physically exhausted. Mountain tops can leave us that way. He needed rest and relaxation. Depression is always related to or reflected in our physical condition.

And fourth is futility Elijah said, "I am the only one left and now they are out to get me." He feels alone, hopeless and has negative expectations about the future. Elijah was looking at life through dark-coloured glasses. He saw no way out.

Have you ever felt like Elijah? Perhaps you are feeling like him right now: afraid, alone, exhausted, burnt-out, hopeless, totally alone. Maybe you are singing the blues.

What helped Elijah climb out of the valley of despair and go on to a lifetime of useful service? God gives us some divine principles for dealing with depression.

Take Time Off We must regularly replace the emotional, physical, and spiritual energy that life drains from us. If we do not, we will

experience burn-out and depression. Elijah needed rest, food, relaxation, and time with God.

Keep healthy. We all need to live balanced lives. We need a rhythm between work and rest. If we don't find it, we will become either a basket case or a casket case. Jesus recognized this and said to His disciples, "Come with me and rest awhile."

Let It All Out Elijah talked through his frustrations. While he sat in a cave feeling sorry for himself, God asked, "What are you doing here? God knew what Elijah was doing there, but asking the question gave Elijah the opportunity to talk and vent his frustrations. Then God listened non-judgmentally as Elijah poured out his feelings of anger, bitterness, and self-pity. We all have such feelings at times and unless we share them, they can become destructive.

Talking is perhaps the most effective way to rid ourselves of harmful emotions. When we talk it is like pulling the plug out of the bathtub. All sorts of bad feelings are drained from us. Everyone needs someone in whom they can confide without fear of condemnation.

And as you talk to others, don't forget to talk to God. He, too, will listen non-judgmentally. Elijah was angry at God, but God was not defensive. He dealt patiently and tenderly with Elijah and He will do the same with you also.

Get Life Back In Perspective When you feel depressed it means your thoughts are focussed on all the negatives and forgetting the positives. Elijah had arrived at the wrong conclusions and so

the Lord chose to reveal just how warped and distorted his view of things had become.

Ultimately all depression can be traced back to some distorted view of life. In Elijah's case, he had a distorted view of himself and a distorted view of God. He needed to know that God was there and that he was not alone.

God had already chosen Elijah's successor and He commanded him to go and anoint Elisha for this work. Elijah thought everything depended on him. We sometimes feel the same way. Listen, if God's work depends solely on you and me, God is in serious trouble.

When I become overly impressed with my own importance, I remember what I read recently: "If all the preachers and all the garbage collectors quit at once, which would you miss first?" Keep life in perspective.

The time for complaints and self-pity were over; Elijah now needed to get back to work. He needed the tonic of a new task.

With us, as with Elijah, the best way to quit feeling sorry for ourselves is to start feeling compassion for somebody else.

Don't sit around in isolation. Don't get all wrapped up in yourself. Don't have your own pity party for too long. Get up and get back into life.

There is a vital lesson in Elijah's experience. Recovery isn't a pinnacle to be reached on an occasional mountain-top – it is a God-empowered process. We may have experienced some great

victories recently or we may be crying in the cave like Elijah, overwhelmed by fear or depression.

No matter where we find ourselves, we need to turn down the volume of the chaos within and open our ears to hear God's soothing whisper.

God asks us to seek Him daily in prayer and meditation on His word, so that our fear and sense of failure can be replaced by an informed and growing faith.

Prayer. God, whose love restores the broken-hearted of this world, pour out your love we beseech you upon those who feel lonely, abandoned, or unloved.

Strengthen their hope to meet the days ahead; give them courage to form life-giving friendships and bless them with the joy of your eternal peace.

In Jesus name Amen.