

## **Digging Out Of Depression** by Jeff Strite

1 Kings 19:1-19:18

OPEN: Over the past few weeks we've been dealing with emotions that can cripple Christians. Two weeks ago, our family minister dealt with the issue of Fear. Last week we dealt with Guilt. And this week we're going to focus on a very real emotion that has crippled thousands: Depression.

OPEN: Psychiatry students were in their college class one day when their professor began a discussion to prove a point. "What we're going to talk about today," the professor said, "are the emotional extremes that many mentally disturbed people go through... for example "What's the opposite of joy?" he asked one student. "Sadness" the student answered. "The opposite of depression?" he asked a young lady. "Elation," she replied.

Turning to a young man from Texas he asked "the opposite of woe?" "Well, now," the Texan replied "I suppose the opposite of woe, would be giddy up."

Depression.

According to Psychiatrists Frank Minrith & Paul Meier, the majority of Americans suffer from a serious, clinical depression at some point in their lives. Most of these people never get help... they just fight this battle on their own.

ILLUS: Years ago I was reading out Reader's Digest and ran across an advertisement for Paxil, an anti-depressant (Reader's.Digest, 2/03). The ad began with these words...

"Depressed Mood  
Loss of Interest  
Sleep Problems  
Difficulty Concentrating  
Agitation  
Restlessness"

Then it concluded with these words: "Life is too precious to let another day go by feeling not quite 'yourself.' If you've experienced some of these symptoms nearly every day, for at least two weeks, a chemical imbalance

could be to blame. And life can feel difficult ALL DAY."

To read this advertisement you would believe that most (if not all) of those suffering from depression are victims of a chemical imbalance. And indeed, the Holy Grail of psychiatrists is to find that magic pill, that powerful potion that will correct that imbalance and give people everywhere relief from the dark moments of sadness and hopelessness.

Depression is very real part of life for many people.

ILLUS: A few years ago, the South East Christian Church offered a time during their Wednesday Evening Service (attendance of at least 600) for people to come forward and have the Elders lay hands on them and pray for healing. The speaker pointed out that there was "a lot of hurt in this room" - sickness, broken relationships, grief. He said that at the invitation, the elders would be available for prayers of healing.

The response began as a trickle. Soon, others began making their way down from the balcony; walking along individually or in pairs, or rolling forward in wheelchairs. Before long, the trickle became a torrent.

Elder Bob Carpenter said he was not prepared for the response to the invitation. "I was totally surprised by the magnitude of it."

Elder Bill Beauchamp did not expect the vast response either... nor did he anticipate the type of prayer needs revealed. "At least 2 out of 3 asked for prayer for depression," he said.

"I thought it would be more for physical needs. But so many said, 'I'm depressed. I feel unworthy. I see no future.'" I was amazed at how many felt unworthy."

ILLUS: At the famous Minrith-Meier Clinics - in an average week - 50,000 people will visit the clinic for therapy. Seventy-five percent of these clients, says Dr. Meier, will have either clinical depression or some sort of anxiety disorder.

Let me repeat... Depression can be a very real problem.

What I find interesting, is that God gives us a case study in clinical depression right here in I Kings 19. This passage tells us the story of the depression that Elijah experienced because of his fear of Jezebel. And in this passage we observe many of the classic symptoms of clinical depression:

\* FEAR - "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life...." 1 Kings 19:3

\* SUICIDAL TENDENCIES – “(Elijah) prayed that he might die. ‘I have had enough, LORD,’ he said. ‘Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.’” 1 Kings 19:4

\* EXCESSIVE TIREDNESS – “Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep...” 1 Kings 19:5 slept for a couple of days... maybe longer

\* FEELINGS OF REJECTION – “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” 1 Kings 19:10

\* And it appears that Elijah experienced this terrible depression for a very long time – nearly 2 months.

Now, what’s really bizarre about this is that, just days before, Elijah had preached one of the greatest sermons of his life. He had confronted 400 prophets of Baal on the Mt. Carmel and exposed them as the false prophets they really were. And because of Elijah’s faith and obedience, God literally sent fire down out of heavens to consume the sacrifice he’d placed on the altar. And then a few hours later sent a downpour of rain on a land that hadn’t had rain for 3 years because God had brought judgment on the land of Israel.

Now, why would a man who had preached an impressive message, and had experienced some of the most powerful displays of God’s power... why would he suddenly be crippled by fear, hopelessness and despair? Why would he run away to a desolate corner of the world and seek to die?

(pause) Well, there’s probably all kinds of reasons, but the fact is – he did. And what this tells us is - that even God’s most dynamic servants can suffer from depression. It’s not necessarily a mark of a lack of faith. It’s not necessarily a mark of an immoral lifestyle.

Elijah was THE man of God in his day. And now he’s so far DOWN in the depths of despair – even UP looks wrong to him.

But that’s not where God left him

God didn’t say: “well sorry Elijah – you have a chemical imbalance, and Paxil hasn’t been invented yet – so I can’t help you!”

Oh no...

long before psychiatry was ever thought of.

long before healing could be bought in the little purple pills.

long before we had clinics and psychiatrists and psychologists.

(not meaning any disrespect to psychiatrists or psychologists or the clinics they run).

But, long before all of that... God healed a man of depression. And it was not an isolated instance. What God did for Elijah, He can do for you and me as well.

Now, I want you to notice what God did to heal Elijah.

1st – God recognized that Elijah’s depression was not an imaginary problem.

Elijah’s depression was real.

It was tangible.

You could have cut it with a knife.

And God did NOT say “get a hold of yourself Elijah. This is a SINFUL attitude ... where’s your faith man???”

Oh, no... God didn’t treat Elijah roughly.

In answer to Elijah’s prayer to die, God just lets him sleep.

Then God’s angel feeds him and lets him sleep some more.

Then God sends him down to the desert in the South for 40 days and nights.

In all that time, God doesn’t say a word.

God doesn’t offer any council.

God doesn’t set Elijah down and have a face to face talk.

In all that time, Elijah is left alone – Elijah’s given time to rest and to think...

ILLUS: About 35 years ago, one of my nephews (my sister’s boy), died in a fire.

My mother was home alone when she received the call that David had died.

(Just a word of caution, a person should never be alone and hearing this type of news over the phone). Alone as she heard the news, something inside of her snapped, and when dad got home he found her disoriented and in a state of shock.

The next day I had a conversation with her and she would say...

“David’s dead?”

“Yes mom, David’s dead” I’d say.

And then she’d talk about him for a while

And then her eyes would glass over as she’d ask again “David’s dead?”...

"Yes mom, David’s dead"

And the conversation would repeat itself all over again... and again... and again.

It's never easy to see someone you love go through such a brokenness.

The doctors advised dad that mom be put in the hospital for awhile.

But dad said "No, I'll never get her back if you do that!"

And for the next few days he never left her side. He waited on her, he held her, he fed her, he prayed with her, and he spoke kindly to her.

No probing questions, no pink pills, no nurses in white... just rest and love.

And in time she recovered and dealt with her grief.

In essence, that's what God did with Elijah.

No sermons, no long counseling sessions... just love and rest.

But eventually God did deal with Elijah's depression and I want you to notice what He did:

1st - God sent him to church.

2nd - God had Elijah tell Him what the problem was.

3rd - God dealt with the false beliefs/ false ideas that were fueling Elijah's depression.

And lastly - God gave Elijah something to do.

Now let's take each of these one at a time.

1st - God sent him to church.

God sent him to Mt. Horeb, the Mountain of God.

Church is one of the best places to deal with Depression. When Church is done right it's the place where we listen to each other and help one another.

Galatians says: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Galatians 6:2

ILLUS: Back in 1999 Duke University conducted a study of nearly 4000 older adults. One of their conclusions: "Attendance at a house of worship is related to lower rates of depression and anxiety."

But church doesn't stop with being in a house of worship.

Time alone with God in prayer and Bible Study is a powerful anti-depressant.

ILLUS: Andrew Newberg, director of clinical nuclear medicine at the University of Pittsburgh used the SPECT technique and made an interesting discovery. Newberg studied the brains of religious individuals who either prayed or meditated. And his team found a dramatic increase in action in the front region of the brain called the pre-frontal cortex. The region is associated with judgment and empathy. The group also discovered decreased activity in a region of the brain known as the superior parietal lobe, which gives us our sense of "self." The findings seem to indicate that people - while engaged in spiritual pursuits - felt a loss of self.

Now, why would that be important that a person would feel a loss of "self"? Because, when a person is weighed down and depressed, all they can see is themselves. All they can see is the tragedies and hopelessness that they must endure. And they can't seem to see anything else. That's what depresses their souls.

Apparently prayer has the power to take our minds off of ourselves. And, because of that, Newberg noted that prayer and meditation had been shown to lower the risk of depression and heart disease and improve immune function.

So, first, God sent Elijah to church

2ndly - God had Elijah tell Him what the problem was.

God asked Elijah: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (I Kings 19:13) God didn't ask this question just one time. He asked Elijah that same question two separate times.

"What are you doing here?"

But... didn't God know?

Of course He knew, He'd sent Elijah to this mountain. But Elijah needed to vocalize what was wrong in his life. Elijah needed to explain what HE thought the problem was. And once Elijah verbalized his belief of what was wrong, then...

3rd - God dealt with the false beliefs, the false ideas that were fueling Elijah's depression.

Jesus said, "The truth shall set you free."

But why would truth set us free?

Because false ideas, false beliefs (especially false ideas about God) have power put us in bondage. Our lives are built around what we think is true about life. And if the foundations of that reasoning are based on wrong

information or impressions, the result can be devastating.

Elijah's reply to God revealed what Elijah had wrong. Elijah didn't think that God was doing anything. In 1 Kings 19:14 Elijah replied to God and said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

Hidden in the midst of that statement was this accusation:

"I've been beating my head against the wall serving you Lord. And everything seems to just be falling apart around me... What have you been doing God???"

And so, God corrects Elijah's thinking.

He tells him "Elijah – you're not the only one left."

In 1 Kings 19:18 God tells Elijah

"I have reserved seven thousand in Israel— all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."

"Elijah, I've not been doing nothing (God seems to be saying).

In fact, I'm just getting started"

"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 ... king over Israel, and anoint Elisha ...to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. (I Kings 19:15-17)

In other words, don't worry about it Elijah.

I've got it all under control.

I AM doing something.

ILLUS: When our allied troops were making their way across Europe to cross Hitler's forces, they came across a bombed out building that had this inscription scrawled on a basement wall:

"I believe in the sun even when it's not shining.

I believe in love even when it is not shown.

And I believe in God even He doesn't speak."

When a person is depressed, they don't think God is doing much of anything. They have no hope, no confidence, and God isn't easily seen by

them. A person in depression needs to realize that – just like Elijah – God IS working in their lives... even when they can't see Him.

One more thing here: God did more than "say" He was doing something. God put on a show for Elijah.

"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." I Kings 19:11-12a

Now, why would God do this?  
Why send the powerful wind?  
Why shake the earth under Elijah's feet?  
Why send a fire that swept across the mountain?

Why? Because God was saying something to Elijah here. He was saying: "Elijah, I can level this mountain if I want to. I can make nothing but a pile of dust. And if I can do that to this mountain, then you have nothing fear from Jezebel, cause I can take her out in a New York minute."

Elijah... I am here for you.  
And I AM doing something.

SO, God got Elijah into Church.  
He got him to tell Him what was wrong.  
And He corrected some of his false thinking and beliefs...

And lastly, God gave Elijah something to do. When God finished His counseling session with Elijah, Elijah was still in his complaining mood, but God basically tells him: "Get back to work. I've got a job for you to do... make yourself useful"

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 ... king over Israel, and anoint Elisha ... to succeed you as prophet." (I Kings 19:15-16)



ILLUS: During a lecture on mental health someone once asked the famous Dr. Carl Menninger: "What would you advise a person to do if that person felt a nervous breakdown coming on?" Most people at the conference thought he would say, "Go see a psychiatrist immediately," but he didn't. Much to everyone's astonishment, Dr. Menninger replied, "Lock up your house, go across the railroad tracks, find somebody in need, and help that person." To overcome discouragement he said: "Don't focus on yourself, get involved in the lives of other people."

ILLUS: At the first church I served there was a woman in the community whose husband died. After his death, she just locked herself up in her house and only went out to get groceries and the mail. She did this for 5 long years.

Then someone in the church suggested I go visit with her. We had a nice talk, some of the men in the congregation fixed a couple things in her house, and she began to come to church. THEN we found out she could play piano and we asked her to play for worship. She brightened right up and from that day on her smile never ceased.

In giving her a job to do, we helped heal her depression and gave her purpose in her life.

CLOSE: Psychiatrists and psychologists and little pink pills can do wonderful things for people suffering from depression... but for real healing it's hard to beat God.

And I want to close with this true story:

During the 1st part of the 20th century, J. C. Penney was a real man who presided over a very real and powerful empire of over 1,700 stores. At the time he had the country's largest chain of department stores, each one bearing his name.

But, although his enterprise made him incredibly wealthy, J.C. Penney's life was not devoid of setbacks and troubles. In fact, beginning in 1929, events took place that nearly cost Penney his life

When the Great Depression struck the country, it came at a time of great financial vulnerability for Penney. In the good times, before the Depression, Penney had overextended himself and had borrowed heavily to finance many of his ventures. But when the Depression hit banks began to request repayment of his loans sooner than anticipated. Suddenly cash flow was tight, and Penney was finding it difficult to meet payment schedules.

Constant and unrelenting worry began to take a toll. "I was so harassed with worries that I couldn't sleep, and developed an extremely painful ailment,"

he said.

Concerned about his deteriorating health, Penney checked himself into the Kellogg sanitarium at Battle Creek, Michigan, (kind of the Mayo Clinic of its era). There, Dr. Elmer Eggleston, a staff physician, examined Penney, declaring that he was extremely ill.

Penney later recalled "A rigid treatment was prescribed, but nothing helped," He was constantly tormented by periods of hopelessness and despair. His very will to live was rapidly eroding.

"I got weaker day by day. I was broken = nervously and physically, filled with despair, unable to see even a ray of hope. I had nothing to live for, I felt that I hadn't a friend left in the world, that even my family had turned against me."

Alarmed by his rapidly deteriorating condition, Dr. Eggleston gave Penney a sedative. However, the effect quickly wore off, and Penney awakened with the conviction that he was living the last night of his life. "Getting out of bed, I wrote farewell letters to my wife and to my son, saying that I did not expect to live to see the dawn."

Penney awakened the next morning, surprised to find himself alive. Making his way down the hallway of the hospital, he could hear singing coming from the little chapel where devotional exercises were held each morning. The words of the hymn he heard being sung spoke deeply to him.

Going into the chapel, he listened to the singing, the reading of the Scripture lesson, and the prayer.

"Suddenly something happened," he said. "I can't explain it. I can only call it a miracle. I felt as if I had been instantly lifted out of the darkness of a dungeon into a warm, brilliant sunlight. I felt as if I had been transported from hell to Paradise. I felt the power of God as I had never felt it before."

In a life-transforming instant Penney knew that God, with His love, was there to help. "From that day to this, my life has been free from worry," he declared. "The most dramatic and glorious 20 minutes of my life were those I spent in that chapel that morning."

The words from the hymn that spoke so eloquently and miraculously to J. C. Penney were these (sing it with me if you know it).

"Be not dismayed whate'er betide, God will take care of you;  
Beneath His wings of love abide, God will take care of you.  
God will take care of you, through every day, o'er all the way;  
He will take care of you, God will take care of you."