

## Elijah (Depression) wk 4

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This is our last week in our Elijah series and today we're talking about *depression*—aka: the “feel good” topic of the summer!

Honestly, I'm pretty excited to teach this last part of Elijah's story because it has some of my favorite Scripture passages in it.

Let's review the past few weeks of Elijah.

The first week we studied that the evil king, Ahab, had turned the hearts of the people away from God to his false prophets.

So out of nowhere, God raises up this prophet, Elijah, who comes and has the audacity to confront this powerful king, and says,

*"It's not going to rain until I ask God to cause it to rain."*

And sure enough, no more rain.

Then, God takes him to this place of isolation—this place of being cut off from blessing—called the Kerith Ravine—and he's humbled in a season of hiding.

But God miraculously provides for him—while he's in the Kerith Ravine, God sends ravens---Joe Flacco & Ray Lewis fly in and drop meat and bread for Elijah.

And somehow in the midst of a draught, he's fed by a brook. This brook comes and God nourishes him, and he learns to depend on God.

And then one day, the brook dried up, and God led him out of the Kerith Ravine to a place called Zarephath.

And there he met a widow who had so little food, she was preparing to die.

And Elijah has the audacity to say,

*"Before you die of starvation, take that itty-bitty bit of food you have and make me something to eat!"* (men are so sensitive)

And sure enough God kept replenishing the food so that they always had enough.

Then, one day, the widow's son *died*, and for the first time ever recorded in the Bible, God brings someone back to life—through Elijah!

(Imagine if they had Twitter back then)

"Another yummy breakfast from nothing--brought a kid back to life.

#prophetlife"

Then, God calls Elijah back to confront King Ahab again.

And Elijah has such audacious faith that he says,

"Hey, bring your 450 false prophets of Baal (bail) and your 400 prophets of Asherah (ASH-er-uh) and I'll bring the one true God and we'll meet up on Mount Carmel and see who wins."

Long story short: the other gods are apparently in a bad cell phone plan and never get the message, never show up.

Elijah calls down fire just short of Hiroshima/Nagasaki type stuff burning up everything in sight. And just to cap it off, they kill the 450 false prophets of Baal.

After that, Elijah goes to the mountain and prays for rain-- and off in the distance, he sees a cloud the size of a man's hand.

And he has the audacity to believe (based on that TINY cloud) that a storm is coming, and sure enough, it is and it rains.

So in Elijah's life, he sees:

miraculous provision  
miraculous protection,  
miraculous fire,  
miraculous God.

Over and over and over again, for years, he's seen the faithfulness, and miraculous power of God in ways that none of us have!

And then we run into today's passage (enter: plot twist)

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 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."

(i.e. "Make your life DEAD too, Elijah!")

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.

1 Kings 19:1-3a

What?!! What's going on with Elijah?

Is this the same guy who called down supernatural fire and slaughtered hundreds of false prophets with God's help?

This isn't the same guy---emotionally anyway.  
He's now depressed. We can see it in this next passage.

When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it

and prayed that he might die. "*I have had enough, Lord,*" he said. "*Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.*" Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep... 1 Kings 19:3b-5a

So let's look at four easy ways to get depressed based on Elijah's story. (a-la TV show "What Not to Wear"—What Not to Do)

(notes)

1) Wear yourself OUT.

Over the past few years, Elijah had been on this massive spiritual epic journey...

Trusting God, praying; trusting God, praying, seeking God, praying, trusting God, battle, faith, battle, faith, battle, and then, he runs for his life.

And then he *leaves his buddy*, the servant, and runs another day's journey out into the desert. He went as far as he could, and he was totally and physically exhausted.

(SELAH)

Why are some of us depressed? Like Elijah, we've worn ourselves out!

Have you noticed the ridiculous number of TV commercials for high-dollar beds that guarantee true rest?

Based on the volume of these ads, we are one unrested, exhausted nation!

It may not be our old bed that's the problem, but everything we're cramming into our day—to the point that *one night's sleep ain't enough!*

Any moms want to get up and testify to the degree you're exhausted and therefore borderline depressed?

Any parents want to testify to the degree of your exhaustion after working all day, then running to the ballpark til 9pm, then trying to get some semblance of housework done, a little "me time" then to bed by 11 or midnight?

Some of us are not exhausting ourselves physically as much as we are mentally—we're exhausted between the ears.

We're constantly running scenarios and to-do lists through our head every second that we're awake.

We're one more thing on our mind away from cracking up!

How to get depressed?

1. WEAR YOURSELF OUT

(notes)

2.) SHUT PEOPLE OUT.

Elijah checked out on his closest friend, his servant. "You stay here; I'm going on."

We do this too when we're overwhelmed—we don't let others in.

Maybe we're afraid of letting someone see that we don't have it all together.

Maybe we're so tired that we don't have the energy to talk this through with someone else—we've run it to death in our own minds—we're sick of the subject. We're too tired to spit it out to someone else.

And honestly, we don't think anyone wants to hear our problems.

Tired and alone is a dangerous place to be.

When we watch Animal Planet and a gazelle wanders off-- away from the herd—what's the next scene we see?

A nice big cat enjoying a yummy gazelle Happy Meal with a free antler toy.

One play the evil one loves to run is isolation: cut us apart from the herd. That's why Ecclesiastes 4:12 says

"A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken."

Ecclesiastes 4:12

You want to be depressed?

Wear yourself out,  
shut people out and

(notes)

3.) FOCUS ON THE NEGATIVE.

This happened to Elijah. He said, "*I've had enough. I'm no better than my ancestors.*"

What's funny is no one was *asking* if he was any better than his ancestors...but in his mind, self-pity was taking over---He was negatively answering questions no one was asking!

And this is a sign to us: if we're answering questions about us, negatively, *that no one is asking*—we're not operating from a healthy place. We are not reflecting our Father, God.

If we have thoughts like,

I am the worst mom/dad ever...  
 I am the worst kid ever...  
 I am the worst employee ever...  
 I am the worst friend ever...  
 I am the worst Christ follower ever...

Our focus and objectivity is jacked-up!  
 We're focusing on an extreme version of the negative.

I keep a very extensive prayer list—right now there are 46 things & people I'm regularly praying for. One of the things I do is to keep things on that list that God has answered.

When I go down that list, when I get to an answered prayer, I notice that I smile—every time I look at an answered prayer.

Why do I keep answered prayers on my list? It's positive. It's affirming. It reminds me that God is working.

You want to be depressed?  
 Wear yourself out,  
 shut people out,  
 focus on the negative and...

(notes)  
 4.) FORGET GOD.

Elijah forgot all the miraculous things God did for him. And we do it too.

We forget how good God is...  
 Forget how much He loves us...  
 Forget how He's provided for us again & again...

When we forget God, hope leaves the building.  
 And when hope is absent, depression thrives. (*repeat*)

To get depressed:  
 1) Wear yourself out.  
 2) Shut people out.  
 3) Focus on the negative  
 4) Forget God

(SELAH)

Let's check in on Elijah and get on the solution side of depression.

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.

The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God."

1 Kings 19:5b-8

(notes)

GOD'S PRESCRIPTION FOR OUR DEPRESSION

1) GOD SAYS TO EAT AND REST.

How much does this say about how good and loving God is?

Does he send an angel to say,

"After all God's done for you, *this* is how you respond?"

Does he send an angel to call him out for giving up?

Does he send an angel to remind Him that our faith is missional? ;-)

I LOVE THIS PASSAGE! God sends an angel to a worn-out God-follower to feed him some warm bread and then lets him take a nap!

What do we call food that makes us feel good—like mom or grandma used to make? Yeah—*comfort food* ;-) It makes us feel good.

In Israel around 550 BC, God serves up the first comfort food!

*How cool is a God who serves up comfort food?!*

And the eating part of this verse, we for the most part...excel at...and then some ;-)

In verse 7 it says, "Strengthened by that food."

Healthy food consumed in healthy ways strengthens us.

Unhealthy foods and unhealthy eating habits are physically killing us with diabetes and host of other diseases—and killing us emotionally with depression-related illness.

The way we're eating in America is not strengthening us—it's weakening us. And if we're not careful, it can be another ingredient in the depression equation. (I could go on...)

(SELAH)

The thing nearly all of us struggle with that comes to light in this passage is the biblical principal of REST.

Listen to me: the most spiritual thing that some of you could do right now--- is REST.

If you are worn out,  
     the answer isn't 5-hour energy drink,  
     the problem isn't work, your spouse, kids or co-workers.

There is only ONE remedy to being worn out and it is REST.

Rest is not optional. Rest is spiritual.

The Sabbath hardly gets taught in church.

Not because it's not true or biblical, but because we don't want to hear it—  
 because we're too busy—too busy wearing ourselves out—  
 too busy believing that life is busy and *that's just the way it is!*

But rest—Sabbath—is spiritual. If we ignore it, like Elijah, we will pay for it.

And today for some of you, these words are like daggers, because you know you're paying the price for your crazy busy life.

Rest requires us to say no to good things.  
 Rest requires us to teach our kids to say no to good things.

No one in the culture models or promotes rest.

Why?

Because the flames of busy-ness and unrest are fanned by the evil one who knows we are at our worst, most vulnerable and least spiritual when we're worn out.

Listen to me:  
 God sent an angel to a worn-out Elijah so he could eat and rest.  
     And that same God wants us to rest weekly.

The road away from depression is paved with rest.

(notes)

2.) GOD REPLACES OUR LIES WITH HIS TRUTH.

There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*"

He (*Elijah*) replied, "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 19:9-10

Notice that God asked him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

God knew the answer--He wanted Elijah to voice his problem—speak the thoughts that were in his head.

This is simply profound:

Our inaccurate, negative thoughts makes sense—*when* they're unspoken, in the vortex of our mind.

But when we speak them, the warped nature of them comes to light.

"I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." FALSE

We say believe these kinds of falsehoods too:

"I'm the only one left"

"I'm the only one who cares."

"I'm the only one who can get it done."

Elijah was taking on more responsibility than was actually his.

He'd done what God asked him to and then thought he was supposed to do *everything*.

Later in the story God will say (in essence), to Elijah, "Truthfully there's 7,000 other Israelites—7,000 others who haven't bowed down to Baal. 7,000 others praying and seeking me—don't believe the lies—you're not the only one, Elijah."

My worst struggle with this was back in 2002 after we'd hired a staff guy named Tony Schwartz. He was a big dog leader from Willow Creek church—one of the largest churches in America.

When he got here, it just sent my insecurity on overload. And like Elijah, I was coming off a very taxing year and a half of ministry—I was exhausted.

For the record, Tony was (and is) a great guy but I was having all kinds of junky negative lies in my head:

*"I'm not that important anymore.*

*Mark's got Tony now—he doesn't need me.  
Tony's doing stuff I used to do—do I still have a place here?"*

I was journaling a lot then, so I created this folder called the "Funk File." I'd write down the truth as it corresponded to the junky thoughts in my head.

Here's one of my entries:

"God chooses people other than me to do His work through. It's about God's will, not about my talent or ability or my involvement level.

Tony has been mentored by the best church leaders of our day. As such he IS further down the road than I may ever be. And that's OK—that's God's plan. I need to appreciate the blessing that I get to be around him, instead of being petty and self-centered.

I am not 'all-world.' Others do things better than I can do them. And that's by God's design & part of His plan. His plan is for Christ to be exalted, not for me to be noticed or revered.

God has unearthed these emotions of insecurity because He wants access to them.

Who am I? I am a husband, father, pastor, friend, son, brother---and in each of those relationships I must realize and reflect the reality of the cross—not the junk of my funk."

(SELAH)

So for me, God replaced the lies with His truth, through journaling. And conversations with Sandra.

Sometimes He does it through His Word. If you're feeling funky, there is nothing like the 100% pure truth of God's Word.

Sometimes God replaces the lies with truth during church. Something is said or a lyric sung and internally a light switch is turned on in our soul—the lie is exposed and the truth comes into focus.

Sometimes God does this through a small group leader or a trusted mature Christ follower.

We voice our funk and their gift of objectivity straightens out the lies and frees us.

(notes)

3.) GOD   SPEAKS   IN A STILL SMALL VOICE.

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*.

1 Kings 19:11-12

God tells him, "Come out of your cave—*come out of your depression*, the Lord is about to pass by."

But not in a hurricane-force wind...  
Not in an earthquake...  
Not in a fire...

But in a way that Elijah must have *least* expected...a gentle whisper...

The truth of this verse?

When we are at our lowest, God often speaks the softest.

I won't call on you or ask you to share, but I'm just curious. Any other crazy people like me, who would say in a low point, you heard the gentle whisper of God in some form or another? (hands?)

What a powerful testimony to the fact that the way God spoke to Elijah in 550 BC is how this unchanging loving God still communicates...

(SELAH)

If you are here today and you are hurting...be it from depression or any of the stings and bruises life offers...

I am confident that our soft-speaking God has a word for you today.

It could be,  
I am here...  
I'll never leave you...  
I am enough...  
I can heal...  
You can trust me...

(pray?)

(notes)

4.) GOD GIVES US SOMETHING TO DO.

The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael (HA-ze-el) king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu (JEE-hoo) son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meh~~o~~lah to succeed you as prophet.

1 Kings 19:15-16

In other words, God's saying to Elijah,  
"Go back to doing what prophets do."

Here's a question for ya...

*Do you think Elijah was 100% ready to go back to being a prophet?*

Think about it—the road of being a prophet led him to a point where he was literally ready to die. That's intense depression!

Don't you think when God said, "go back," that Elijah still had some reservations? Some thoughts like,

*"Wow...I hope I'm ready to get back on that horse..."*

Do you think he was 100% healed? 100% recovered?

As I read this passage, it reminded me of our Haiti team ordeal from last November. Bruce was pivotal and right in the middle of that skirmish with the Haitian gunmen and had even been shot.

In the weeks after our experience, I was kind of watching us as a team...looking to see how we were all doing.

I noticed this subtlety about Bruce. He wasn't exactly himself.

He had a little bit of an edge to him—just a little. Under the surface, he was mad. A little angry.

He ended up going back to Haiti in January—just a couple months after being shot. He felt like he had to go. Like God was telling him to go.

And I knew he wasn't 100% all healed up.  
But God was calling him back—back to doing what Bruce does.

And so Bruce went. And when Bruce came home a couple months later—guess what?

He was the same old Bruce.

What we've seen in Elijah and Bruce's life-- is that  
***God doesn't always do all of our healing on the sidelines.***

After we rest...after we replace lies with truth...after we listen for God's gentle whisper...we go back to doing that thing we do.

Being a mom...  
A business man...  
A provider...  
A servant...  
A person of prayer...  
A person who loves again...  
A person who hopes again...  
Whatever it is for you.

(SELAH)

I know that depression is real.

I know that if you live in it, it feels more complicated than this talk made it seem...

Whether you're in a season of darkness—a Kerith Ravine—or whether depression is a lifelong battle for you---I want you to know that there is hope in Christ.

As big as the darkness feels for you at times—the light of Christ is infinitely brighter.

I want you to know that Christ overcame this world.  
And that includes depression and Kerith Ravines.

And because Christ overcame this world--through Him—we too, overcome this world.

Look at these words:

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble.  
*(you'll find yourself in a ravine—in the darkness of depression)*  
But take heart! *(choose HOPE!)*  
I have overcome the world."

John 16:33

<sup>4</sup> for everyone born of God overcomes the world...

1 John 5:4 niv

Let me pray through the chorus of this song and then Joel is going to prayerfully sing this song over us...I believe these are the words that God wants us to walk out of here with...pray with me:

"Oh Lord, I thank You that we are strong in you,

That we are wise in You,  
 That we can see, as You see.  
 Lord, I thank You for the promise that we can overcome.  
 Lord, thank You that we are loved by You,  
 That we are free in You,  
 That we are complete in You!  
 Lord, thank You that no matter how deep our ravine, we will overcome IN YOU  
 and THROUGH YOU! (*NO Amen..*)."

***I Will Overcome*** -Charlie Hall

And I can see that my hands are trembling, I can see that my legs are weak  
 I can see that my head is spinning, but I will overcome  
 And I know that my heart is hurting, And I know that my soul it aches  
 And I know that it seems I'm failing, but I will overcome, yeah

Chorus:

O Lord I'm strong in You, O Lord I am wise in You  
 O Lord I can see in You, so I will overcome  
 O Lord I'm loved by You, O Lord I am free in you  
 O Lord I'm complete in You  
 So I will overcome, I will overcome, I will overcome

Bridge:

God listen to me shout, I'm so far from anywhere and I'm calling out  
 Lead me, lead me to the rock that is higher than I  
 You're my breath, You're my breath, You're my very life  
 Infinite, Holy King meets weak and frail Christ in me  
 And I will overcome not by my strength but by Your grace and love