

PP Standing In the Gap: *Elijah, a Man Like Us*

Part 11- *To the Cave and Back*, Part 1, **1 Kings 19:8-18** 1/14-15/2012

Illus The Italian poet Dante, captured our struggling prophet well: *“In the middle of the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, for I had lost the right path.”*

Last week, we saw that when Jezebel’s threat had come to him, he ran in fear
110 miles he traveled, on foot, in his own power, until finally, alone, he lay down in the wilderness, under a broom tree, despairing of life, and fell asleep

We saw that there were several cluster that had brought him there:

***Fear**, one of the most prevalent roots in depression

***Isolation**, by leaving his servant and going by himself he was forsaking community

***Pride**, as his internal compass needle turned from living according to the Word of God and going his own way

***Fatigue**, his body was exhausted, having gone his own way in his own power

Where we left off last week was when the angel said to him: *“Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you. And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.”* 7-8

It was a journey of around 200 miles from where Elijah was in the wilderness to Mt. Horeb

Normally, that is a 13-14 day trip by foot, averaging 15 miles a day

It took Elijah 40 days, revealing the wandering nature of depression, the inability to focus

We might not be familiar with the name of this mountain, but it goes by another name, Sinai, where God met with Moses and gave Israel the Law

It was there that God first miraculously provided this newly freed nation with water from a rock

Finally, *“There he came to a cave and lodged in it.”* 9

Again, another powerful metaphor for the trapped, dead end fee of depression

Still Elijah cannot shake this despair, and 40 days, it has now had time to deepen and darken

Elijah’s is a soul that has, like Jeremiah’s sunk down to the bottom

He is stuck in the miry clay at the bottom of the pit of deep despair and sadness

Author Ed Welch calls depression ‘*a stubborn darkness*’¹ one that traps you into it

You can’t prescribe two Bible verses and have depression clear up like a headache

It is interesting to note that Elijah didn’t come to ‘*a cave*’

The definite article in the Hebrew indicates he came to ‘*the cave*’, a specific one

Many believe it was the same cleft, or cavern that God put Moses in as He passed by in His glory

He is in the cave when God said to Him, *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

Our all-knowing God’s asks questions for a reason: they are probes that go deep down into our hearts to bring up for us what we need to see

And what the question reveals are two additional roots to Elijah’s depression, the first one is,

PP 5-Discouragement

Some discouragement comes from intense trials, the kind the Jewish captives expressed in **PP PP**

Babylon: *“By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres.”* Psalm 137:1-2

¹ Depression, by Ed Welch

And then there is discouragement, that oddly enough, comes after times of great spiritual victory
“I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts...I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” 10

Wait a minute, Elijah just orchestrated national revival, prayed rain in after 3 ½ years of drought
He is at the top of his game, the peak of his ministry

“I’ve been very jealous for” you God, putting you before everything else, but for what?

There is a ministry principle we need to remember: Every high wave is followed by an equally low trough, every victory for Christ is followed by an attack by our enemy

They are so predictable that I began warning teens at the end of our retreats

I know you sensed God really close to you this weekend, but watch out, your enemy will come to you furiously, trying to tempt you and discourage you

One moment Elijah is on a spiritual high, the next he is under attack and running for his life

All that he had worked for seemed to be crushed in Jezebel’s death threat and he plunged into discouragement that slid into depression

PP There is a reason **Proverbs 13:12** tells us that ***“Hope deferred makes the heart sick”***

Depression is often described as if the heart has broken with a sense that it will never heal

So give up, lay down under the broom tree, walk into that dead end cave and just hide

And it’s right where the roaring lion wanted you to go: out of the game, and no longer a threat

But we see another root cause clustered in Elijah’s depression

PP 6-Anger

What am I doing here God?

And Elijah answered: ***“Israel [has] forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword...” 10***

I’m here because of their sins, it’s their fault

You look deep into spiritual depression and you’ll find an angry blame game being played

In fact, experts provide a formula that goes, sadness + anger = depression

One woman, so angry at her husband’s inability to understand her, grew so bitter that she finally declared, *‘I don’t feel anything for him anymore.’*

It isn’t uncommon that a depressed person feels nothing, it’s almost a self-protective cloak

And when anger underpins depression, it doesn’t always run hot

One severely depressed man shut down and didn’t say a single word to his wife for over a year

And self-righteous anger distorts our thinking and this is what we see in Elijah

If you were in that cave with Elijah, you might want to carefully point out to him that God has asked what you are doing here

You might want to point out to him that it was Ahab and Jezebel that had killed God’s prophets, not the people of Israel

And Elijah, not to get picky, but there was one altar, not plural, and while we’re at it, Obadiah told you that there 100 faithful prophets that he was protecting, you’re hardly alone

The thinking of depressed people is hardly accurate, yet they feel it is, and like Jonah, Elijah begins to hint that the blame goes beyond Israel to God Himself

‘Your covenant’, ‘Your altars’, ‘Your prophets’

What am I doing here God, it’s because Israel has terrible things and You’ve not done a thing

about it, including doing good job of protecting me, your jealous servant

Elijah, our mighty prophet is an absolute mess, he is stuck in despair, he needs rescuing
What will God do for him, and for us, when we find ourselves depressed?

PP 1-God will find you

Back in verse 7, we read of **‘the angel of the Lord’** twice ministering to Elijah
Friends, that wasn’t Michael, or Gabriel or any other created celestial being, it was Jesus Christ
‘The angel of the Lord’ is one of His Old Testament titles
Jesus extended His holy perfect righteous hand to wake Elijah up
How do you like to be awakened from sleep?
My father would throw open the curtains and whistle the *‘It’s time to get up in the morning’*
It never failed to wake me up in an absolutely terrible mood
My brother outdid him as one time he threw a lit firecracker on my pillow
It exploded, and as my body lurched off that bed, and my eyes flew open, the sight before me
was feathers floating in the air and my brother’s maniacal evil grin
Can’t you picture the tender, loving touch of Jesus awakening our fallen, overwhelmed prophet?

PP He is *“gentle and lowly in heart, [offering] rest for your souls.”* **Matthew 28:29**

God came to Elijah in the wilderness, but look with me at verse 9: ***“And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him”*** **9**

The Word of the Lord is embodied, He is a Person Who comes to speak with Elijah

PP And according to **Revelation 19:13**, His name is Jesus Christ

Once again, Jesus has personally come to help His struggling servant

Brothers and sisters, know this for certain when you struggle, God knows where you are, and He
will personally come to you and place His touch upon you

PP 2-God will give you grace through His Spirit

PP When we are disobedient, God will sometimes fire warning shots across our bow, ***“For the Lord disciplines the one He loves”*** **Hebrews 12:6**

Even then He is loving, and even those fearful times are demonstrations of His grace
But when we are broken in despair and depression, God moves toward us in another way
entirely, with the soft touch of His gentle grace!

PP ***“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”*** **Psalms 103:13**

Again, God spoke to Elijah: ***“And He said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.”***
Take note, this is not a request, it’s a command

“And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.” **11-12**

And we’d think such a powerful display of might had to drive that depression right out of Elijah

And then we look around a little more closely and ask, where is Elijah?
The answer is, he is still in the back of the cave
God told him to go out and stand on the mount before the Lord as a servant should, and verse 13
tells us, it wasn't until after he heard ***"the sound of a low whisper"*** that he moved
Then ***"he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave."*** 13
It was the low whisper, the sound of the Spirit's grace that enabled Elijah to stand before God,
the place of a servant
It is so easy in life to hunger and expect God to work through displays of His power
Elijah had been fed by birds for many months, had seen God fill jars of oil and flour daily out of
nothing, bring a dead boy back to life, and send fire down from heaven
Without knowing it, you begin to anticipate and hunger for the next miracle, the next incredible
display of God's power, and soon your faith is built on those displays
But the outward demonstrations of power have never been the norm for God
They don't build faith, in fact they tend to make your faith anemic
God works in our hearts, on an individual, corporate and national level
And He works on our hearts through the low whisper of grace spoken by His Spirit
PP ***"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."*** Zechariah 4:6

Object permanence is something that is developed in toddlers as they mature
You roll a ball with a 2 year old and they will toddle after it, but if that ball goes under the couch,
within seconds they will forget it is there
There is an object permanence that develops in our faith as well, that matures as we grows, and
doesn't need the overt demonstrations of God's power, rather it listens for and is satisfied
with the quiet working of His Spirit's voice in us
Elijah, Israel has seen the display of My power, but I will send them My Spirit, and He will turn
their hearts to me
Have faith, cling to My grace, and trust!
Elijah is drawn out of that cave by that gracious voice, and again God asked him the same
question, and still Elijah gave the same exact, rehearsed answer
He is on his way to healing, but he isn't there yet, God has more to do for his struggling servant

PP 3-God will restore you on purpose

"And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint...."

We are almost on the edge of our seats with outrage at what seems to be cosmic insensitivity
Take him by the shoulders God, look him in the eye, tell Him you love him and that it'll be ok
Likely, if you or I were God, we would have done something like that with Elijah
How good it is that we aren't God, because while the depressed person may appreciate those
affirmations, they are not ultimately helped by them
God-*His title is Wonderful Counselor*-knows exactly what Elijah needed
He goes to the source of Elijah's depression, and restores a sense of purpose

Elijah felt he had failed and had no purpose to live for: ***'I am no better than my fathers'*** (4)
He didn't need a pat on the back, or a thank you note from God

He needed grace, the grace that restores purpose to life and usefulness to God
God gives him assignments, and in doing that correcting the lies that Elijah had believed: *Elijah,*
I'm not done with you yet, you have a reason to live and a purpose to fulfill

Friends, do you know why you exist on this earth?

The vast majority of humanity doesn't, and the church isn't really an exception

Sure, we know we are to glorify God and tell others about salvation in Christ

But what is God's specific job for you, His purpose for you to fulfill?

What has he called you to do that only His grace can help you do?

That is your mission

In March of 2006, I was floundering in ministry, and I had been for a few years

Earlier I had written a resignation letter to the Board, but had not yet submitted

I kept it to remind me to never give up and I read it again this past week

It was laced through and through with the same self-righteous anger and blame that Elijah had

I'm glad I never submitted it because it was sinful

And one morning, discouraged and floundering, contemplating change, I was praying and asking

God what He wanted me to do, and He couldn't have responded more clearly

It felt like he branded His answer across my soul so I would always see it and never forget it

He told me what His purpose was for my life

Tim, I created you, and gifted you to take My Word, get it to the hearts of people and lead them
to transformation

Don't just teach information, don't just get it to the mind, get it to the heart, and be real

I'll never forget that moment, where for the first time in my life, I knew why I was on this planet

I didn't figure that out from a book, or song, though both of those are tools God sometimes uses

He spoke personally into my struggling heart, and let me know what He had called me to do

That is my mission and my purpose in life

What is God's purpose for you, what is His mission for your life?

If you find yourself under a broom tree, or in a cave of depression, likely, you have lost a sense
of God's purpose for your life

How do you find it and discover it?

The same way Elijah did, the same way I did, from the mouth of God Himself

Pray, let God's Word dwell in you richly, He will make His purposes clear for your life

There is so much more to this story that we just did not have time to see

How God moved Elijah back into community

How he told Elijah that he wasn't alone, that there will 7,000 faithful besides himself

How Elijah began to pour himself into mentoring and discipling Elisha, who would take up

God's mission after Elijah was gone

But remember this, if you will stand in the gap and defend God's glory, you are likely to find
yourself under the broom tree of despair and stuck in the cave of depression

If and when, hold on to the story of Elijah and take comfort

God will find you, He will whisper into your darkness a message of His grace and restore your
life on purpose

Was God successful in bringing Elijah out of that cave of depression?

The next verse gives us our answer: ***"So he departed from there" (19:19a)***

Pray

