

A Chronicle of Despair  
1 Kings 19:1-15

**Slide 1**

What a strange turn of events in the life of our hero we read in 1 Kings 19. Why would this man of God be so despondent that he hoped to die? What brought Elijah to this point?

First, Elijah had stood boldly before King Ahab and proclaimed that God would judge the nation of Israel by withholding rain for an extended period of time.

And then, when the drought came, Elijah had to flee for his life. Yet, as he hid, God miraculously sustained him with water and food every day.

Second, he performed some awesome miracles while a foreigner in a pagan land.

He lived with a widow where he made a smidgen of flour and a little bit of oil last forever, and when the widow's son took sick and died, Elijah raised him from the dead.

Finally, Elijah confronted 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, prayed fire down from the sky and proved that Yahweh was God. It was literally a mountaintop experience.

After which Elijah stood before King Ahab and pronounced that the rain was returning. He told Ahab to get back to his palace before the rain causes his chariot to get stuck in the mud. Then the rains came!

Then Elijah, under the promptings of the Holy Spirit, tucked his robes in his belt and ran back to Jezreel, arriving ahead of King Ahab.

As he waited at the gates, he was probably visualizing Ahab telling Jezebel about all that happened and them praising God. He couldn't wait to see the joy in their eyes. But, that's not what happened.

## **Slide 2**

This is where we pick up today's story in 1 Kings 19. When Ahab gets back to the palace, he tells Jezebel all that happened on Mount Carmel.

Now Jezebel, being partial to all those prophets of Baal and Asherah, became angry and made the promise to kill Elijah before the day was done.

1 Kings 19:2, *"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."*

Verse 3a, *"Elijah was afraid and ran for his life."* One day after the most awesome day in his life, this godly, miracle-working, energetic prophet is ready to throw in the towel.

1 Kings 19:4, *"while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, 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."*

Elijah had gone from despair to full-blown depression. I can hear some people say, *"What? A person of faith and courage battling depression? It can't be! That's a sad testimony to a life of faith. Aren't people of faith supposed to be joyful?"*

Doesn't Jesus promise a life of joy in him? Didn't Jesus say in Matthew 11:28, *"Come to me all who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest?"* How can a person of such godliness, faith and courage be depressed?

Depression and anxiety tend to be some of those touchy subjects that are tough to tackle from a Christian perspective.

It's not only complicated since the illnesses themselves are so complex, but because the perspectives about mental disorders vary greatly throughout the Church.

As followers of Christ, we're supposed to be characterized by joy and peace, but it's also true that many Christians battle with depression on a daily basis.

Jesus wants to transform us, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, Jesus can transform us as we look to Him for guidance and grace.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines depressed as "1. Low in spirits, dejected. 2. Suffering from psychological depression."

Who among us hasn't felt the first: Low in spirits, dejected? Some feel it when they take a major test only to discover they didn't do so well on it. Others may feel it when a relationship goes south.

We've all been there, done that, and have the t-shirt to prove it. Right? That second definition, though, is a bit different: Suffering from psychological depression.

Current estimates put the number somewhere between 12 and 17 million people who suffer with psychological depression. It's been called the "common cold" of psychological disorders.

We're not going to solve that issue here in this short message, but Elijah's experience reflects that even people of great faith can struggle with depression.

### **Slide 3**

Now, depression has many causes, but it usually falls into one of four categories: temperamental, circumstantial, psychological and physical.

First is temperamental. People are simply wired differently. You've known someone who was "steady as a rock," and you've also known others who were up and down like yo-yo's.

The optimist and the pessimist—glass half full, glass half empty kind of people.

Then, there are people like Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh. No matter how hard they try they just can't see the good. A person's temperament can be a cause of depression.

Second is circumstantial, also called situational depression. One of the four D's can trigger depression—death, disease, divorce, and disaster.

Three circumstances in Elijah's life probably led to his depression.

First was the mountaintop experience when he prevailed over the prophets of Baal. All of us want to win and have that mountaintop moment.

The problem is there is only one direction to go from there. The aftermath of a high moment in life, spiritual and otherwise is prime time for depression.

A second circumstance was his run-in with Jezebel. Part of Elijah's problem may have been that he couldn't win her favor.

He's like, "Didn't you hear what I did? Can't you see I'm a good guy, here?" He couldn't change her opinion of him, and that caused a problem for him.

Finally, Elijah was lonely. He left his servant in Beersheeba and went into the wilderness alone where he moaned *“I am the only one left”* of the Lord’s prophets.

When we feel we’re alone, regardless if we are, or not, we’re susceptible to depression.

During WWII, the Nazis discovered the most effective form of torture was solitary confinement. After just a few days of total isolation, most soldiers would tell all.

The third category is psychological. Psychologists say the number one cause of depression is repressed anger.

People who become angry at themselves, at others, or even at God tend to internalize their anger. This makes a person feel sorry for him/herself which leads to depression.

Elijah had reason to be angry, yet he reacted to Jezebel’s threat, not with anger at her, or with faith in God, but with fear. 1 Kings 19:3 says he was *“afraid.”*

Elijah fell into what Zig Ziglar called “stinkin’ thinkin.’ Forgetting that God had provided for him on at least two previous occasions, his stinkin’ thinkin’ caused him to fall into self-pity and run for his life.

Here are some other examples of stinkin’ thinkin’:

- “I try to be a loving spouse, but nothing I do seems to make a difference.”
- “I try to be a good parent. I make sacrifices and no one notices. What’s the use?”
- “We try to get out of debt. We make a budget and keep to it, but then the car breaks down. It’s futile!”

Then, the fourth category is physical. Clinical depression in some people is caused by a chemical imbalance of serotonin in the brain, and that makes people prone to feelings of despondency.

Medication can help people with this issue. Physicians and prescriptions are often sources of God's healing grace as much as pastors and prayers!

Beyond the chemical problems, there are things we do to induce those imbalances: poor diet, lack of exercise and physical exhaustion. These things can affect serotonin levels and worsen feelings of depression.

Think about this: Elijah had just run 36 miles across the desert. He was mentally, physically, and spiritually tired, so he sat down under a broom tree and prayed for God to take his life.

You and I aren't exempt from the consequences of fatigue. We all have limited physical resources and if we continue to burn the candle at both ends it'll eventually burn out.

When Elijah despaired of life, God showed up, and Elijah found the capacity to continue on the mission to which he'd been called.

I'm not suggesting that any of us with a chemical imbalance or serious psychological disorder can suddenly get well the way Elijah did.

But with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, God can transform the desperation of daily life into a deep determination to live in the fullness of God's grace.

#### **Slide 4**

So, here's the prescription I see in Elijah's Chronicle of Despair.

First is rest, or recuperation. God took care of Elijah's physical needs. Verses 5 – 6 tell us Elijah slept and that the angels came and ministered to him by providing him bread and water.

God just let him rest. No chastisement for having a bad attitude or no faith. Simple rest and nourishment so his body could recover.

One of the most spiritual things we can do is rest. God built it into creation—it's called the Sabbath.

Jesus was always taking time to get away, and he often encouraged his disciples to do so, too. It's amazing how a little rest can renew our spirits and replenish our spiritual resources.

Likewise, diet and exercise helps to keep the blues away. If God sent you an angel like He did Elijah, what would that angel tell you to do?

Would he tell you to put the chips away and get off the couch? Turn the TV off and take a walk? It's almost impossible to overcome despair in our lives if we're not eating right and resting well.

Revelation is another part of the prescription. God helped Elijah get his mind off his problems and on to the awesome power of God as he received a revelation of God's glory.

This is where God tells Elijah to stand on the mountain and watch for Him as He passes by.

He wasn't in the wind, nor the earthquake, or even in the fire. God was in the gentle whisper. That's where Elijah heard God's voice.

We can never be transformed without an encounter with the Living Lord. It is in such an encounter that we sense God's awesome power and presence. In our darkest times, we need to know God is with us.

There are two ways we can get a new revelation of God's presence and power: read the Bible and go to church!

A philosopher once said, *"If you act the way you wish you felt, you'll eventually feel the way you're acting."*

John Wesley counseled his preachers by saying, *"Lack ye faith? Then, pray until you get it."*

Therefore, don't wait until you feel like reading the bible or going to church. Get up, go worship and sing songs of joy. It'll change your life.

In one study, researchers at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts, followed 159 individuals with depression over the course of a year to examine the relationship between a person's level of belief in God, expectations for treatment, and actual treatment outcomes.

Individuals with no belief — or only a slight belief — in God were twice as likely to not respond to treatment than people with stronger beliefs. Bible study and worship attendance promote healing.

Finally, there's responsibility. After God revealed Himself to Elijah on the mountain, He told him to go back the same way he came and perform some tasks.

1 Kings 19:15-16, *"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 son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet."*

God didn't exempt Elijah from Jezebel's wrath; He just gave Elijah some new responsibilities.



## **Slide 5**

### Conclusion

We must learn that we can't control what other people do, and sometimes the actions of others create desperation in our lives.

There's nothing we can do about the other people. Sometimes in life, we don't need pity so much as we need responsible direction and a new goal.

When we're facing desperate circumstances, we should pray that God will give us a new challenge and be on the lookout for what that new challenge might be—a new hobby, a new ministry or even a new career.

We don't always need to seek security as much as we need to seek a new challenge.

Rest, revelation and responsibility—not always the cure-all for desperate times, but based on Elijah's own experience, it seems to be a good starting place when our lives are writing their own chronicle of despair.