

Sunday, September 3, 2022 | Feels: Thriving in the Valleys

1 Kings 19:1-18 | "The Valley of Depression"

Sometimes our spiritual lives feel like a series of peaks and valleys. One moment, we feel like we are soaring high; the next, we experience a crushing low. This Sunday, we'll be starting a five-week series called Feels: Thriving in the Valleys, and this study is all about what we should do when we hit the low points in life. Along the way, we'll examine the journey of faith through the eyes of five famous bible characters: Elijah, Paul, Moses, Joseph, and Peter. By the end of this series, the hope is that the Christian will be equipped to combat the negative "feels" that seem to plague us and steal away our inner peace.

READ: 1 Kings 19:1-18 (ESV)

¹ Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." ³ Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." ⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷ And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." ⁸ 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.

⁹ There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹¹ And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." 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.¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a **low whisper**.¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing **here**, Elijah?"¹⁴ He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."

¹⁵ And the Lord said to him, "**Go**, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be **king** over Syria. ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be **king** over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah you shall anoint to be **prophet** in your place. ¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. ¹⁸ Yet I will leave **seven thousand** in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Notice three ways the Lord comforted Elijah while he was depressed:

i. The Lord still provided for Elijah (cf. 1 Ki. 19:5-8).

Elijah ran to the wilderness, pleading with God to kill him but instead of taking his life, the Lord gave Elijah some food. Twice we read about how Elijah lay under a bush to sleep and how, twice, he was awoken by an angel who gave him bread to eat.

Jesus Christ, in the New Testament, tells us the same thing God was trying to tell Elijah: Don't be afraid; I will provide for you.

READ: Matthew 6:25-34 (ESV)

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?^[E] ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things,

and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Even though Elijah seemed unphased by an angel providing him with food, the Lord cared enough for this despondent prophet to give him rest and nutrition.

ii. The Lord still listened to Elijah (cf. 1 Ki. 19:9-14).

After traveling for over a month and hundreds of miles, Elijah comes to Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai, and has a conversation with God. The Lord asks Elijah why he is here on a mountain rather than in Israel, and the prophet bursts out, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”

READ: 1 Peter 5:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

READ: Hebrews 4:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

While the question "What are you do here, Elijah?" was a gentle rebuke about how the prophet had abandoned his post, the fact remains that the Lord did not cast Elijah away. Instead, he listened to Elijah and revealed himself to him. Likewise, when we go to God in prayer, calling out to him and listing out our worries, the Lord hears and answers us. Prayer moves the heart of God and draws us closer to him.

iii. God still had a mission for Elijah (cf. 1 Ki. 19:15-18).

It is clear that Elijah, even after the wind, earthquake, fire, and whisper, is still in a depressed state. When asked again why he was there on a mountain rather than at his post in Israel, the prophet responded precisely as he did when he first arrived at Sinai. Elijah was still depressed. However, this did not excuse nor disqualify him from his mission. The Lord still valued Elijah.

God still had a task, a mission, and a purpose for him. He sends him back, telling him to appoint new kings and his successor, Elisha, and revealing that 7,000 people had yet to bow the knee to Baal.

READ: 2 Corinthians 12:2-10 (ESV)

²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. ⁵On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—⁶though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. ⁷So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Elijah learned, just as Paul, that often we do not serve the Lord in strength but in weakness. And it is through those seasons where we do not seem to have enough, that we find that the Lord makes up the difference. God's light is better seen in those valleys of darkness. And ironically, we are better led by it, for it is the only thing we can see. It is sometimes hardest to feel the warmth of God's light while basking in the brightness of the noonday sun. Darkness has a way of bringing clarity to the light of the Lord.

So, what's the takeaway?

Communing with God and fellowshiping with others helps to soothe the depressed heart.

Isolation is depression's primary weapon. Elijah thought he was alone, but God was with him throughout his sorrow, as we saw in today's story. Moreover, after he reminded Elijah of his presence using a "low whisper," God did not send Elijah back to the proverbial lion's den, still thinking he was alone. Not only was God walking beside him, but others were waiting for Elijah's return. God revealed that there were kings, prophets, and 7,000 followers of God who

were on Elijah's side. Elijah had both the backing of God and the people. Far from being isolated without hope, he was surrounded by helpers.

Likewise, when we are depressed, we tend to think that we are alone and that even God himself has abandoned us. This is simply not true. Take heart, dear Christian; you are not alone, nor will you be left alone. God walks with us through the valley of depression and sends others alongside us to encourage us on our journey. And while it is true that we may still wrestle with feelings of sorrow, after all, depression is not so easily cured. But may we never think we fight on our own. In the meantime, when the night is in full swing and the dawn is a long way off, may we see that our God, brothers, and sisters are in the ring with us.

BOOK RECOMMENDATION: *Untangling Emotions* by J. Alasdair Groves

Video Description

Feels | Week 1 | “The Valley of Depression”

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: