

Coping with Depression (1 Kings 19:1-18; Phil 4:4)

Prepared and preached by Pastor Steve Rhodes for and at Bethel Friends Church in Poland, OH on Sunday, October 16, 2022

- *Each morning Angela struggles to find the energy to get out of bed. She feels listless and down. Her kids need her, but she can't summon the energy to even interact with them—much less prepare meals or clean the house.*
- *George is having a hard time thinking clearly. He lost his job and just can't seem to crawl out of the hole he feels that he's fallen into. He doesn't interview because he's so down, so he sits around at home and plays on the computer. And he just keeps spiraling downward.¹*

Today, I want to talk about how to cope with depression.

My theme:

I intend to talk about how to cope with depression and give an example of a depressed prophet.

I. Depression:

- Thirty-five million Americans (more than 16 percent of the population) suffer from depression severe enough to warrant treatment at some time in their lives. In one given period, thirteen to fourteen million people experience the disorder.¹²*
- Depression can have a variety of meanings because there are different types of depression. Clinical depression as a disorder is not the same as brief mood fluctuations or the feelings of sadness, disappointment, and frustration that everyone experiences from time to time and that last from minutes to a few days at most. Clinical depression is a more serious condition that lasts weeks to months, and sometimes even years.³*
- Misdiagnosis of depression is common. It can often be misdiagnosed as anxiety, which is a common affect in many types of depression or other*

¹ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, [*The Quick-Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling: Personal and Emotional Issues*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 73.

¹ "Statistics," *National Institutes of Health* (2003).

² Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, [*The Quick-Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling: Personal and Emotional Issues*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 73.

³ *Ibid*, 73.

- mood disorders. Accurate assessment is the first step to proper treatment.*⁴
- d. *Depression differs from sadness, which is a God-given reaction to loss that serves to slow people down so they can process grief. When one is sad, self-respect remains intact, intrinsic hope is maintained, and relief comes after crying and receiving support.*⁵
 - e. *Clinical/major depression* is distinct in that symptoms are so severe that they disrupt one's daily routine.
 - f. *Dysthymic disorder* is a chronic, low-grade depression.
 - g. *Bipolar disorder*, previously known as manic depression, is a type of mood disorder with severe changes in affect. A person may have periods of euphoric elatedness contrasted with periods of severe major depression.
 - h. *Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)* is a severe onset of "winter blues" when one experiences depression, most often believed to be due to lack of sunlight (or vitamin D).⁶
 - i. Dr. Gary Collins writes: *For more than three thousand years, depression has been recognized as a common problem. It is a worldwide phenomenon that affects individuals of all ages, including infants. In the United States alone, an estimated seventeen million people suffer from clinical depression. One web site suggests that depression has an impact on nearly everybody if we consider both the depressed people and their family members, friends, work colleagues, and others.*⁴ *Depression disrupts lives, interferes with normal functioning, often causes problems at work, reduces efficiency, hinders spiritual growth, and can destroy family and social life. It has a major impact on the economy as billions of dollars are lost annually because of depression in the workforce. Some of history's greatest military leaders, statesmen, musicians, scientists, and theologians have been its victims, including Winston Churchill, George Frederick Handel, Edgar Allen Poe, Napoleon Bonaparte, Vincent van Gogh, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon. But depression is no respecter of persons. It is known as the common cold of mental disorders. On*

⁴ Ibid, 73.

⁵ Ibid, 74.

⁶ Ibid.

⁴ There is abundant information about depression on the Internet. In addition to the professional sources that I have consulted for this chapter, I have gone to the Internet for updated information. One helpful source is www.psychologyinfo.com/depression. This site also contains information about many of the other issues discussed in this book.

*occasion probably all of us experience depression, sometimes when we least expect it. In its milder forms depression may come as a passing period of sadness that follows a loss or personal disappointment. More severe depression overwhelms its victims with feelings of despair, fear, exhaustion, immobilizing apathy, hopelessness, inner desperation, and thoughts of suicide.*⁷

II. Let's look at a depressed prophet.

a. Let's Read: 1Kings 19:9-14: *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?" 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." 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. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. 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?" 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." 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. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. 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. 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."*

b. Background

a. In 1 Kings chapter 18:21 Elijah got together with all these Israelites who were following the false prophet, Baal. However, these Israelites

⁷ Gary R. Collins, [*Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*](#), 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 120.

wanted to follow God and Baal. Elijah told them to choose a side. If the Lord is God, follow Him. If Baal, follow him. However, the people wouldn't listen to Elijah, so Elijah had this idea. There were 450 prophets of Baal and only Elijah as a prophet of God. Elijah told them to set up a sacrifice for their god Baal and wait for him to consume it with fire. Elijah further said that he will set up a sacrifice for the Lord and wait for Him to consume it with fire. Baal didn't consume the sacrifice, but the Lord did! This made people want to worship the Lord. Except for the prophets of Baal whom Elijah had killed.

- b. After this in the beginning of chapter 19 the evil queen Jezebel finds out and sends a message to Elijah that she wants to kill him.
- c. Elijah is now running for His life.
- d. The Lord provided food.
- e. Now he ends up on Mt. Horeb in a Cave. So what happened in this cave and why?
- f. The text: What happened? Why?
- g. Elijah is lodging in this cave. He might have been lodging there because he didn't think Jezebel would find him there.
- h. This cave is also on Mt. Horeb which is in the mountains of Sinai. Mt. Sinai is where Moses had seen the burning bush. There was also an incident where Moses hid in a cave while God in all His glory passed before him.
- i. Maybe Elijah wants a dramatic experience like Moses had.
- j. Elijah may want to see God work again in mighty ways.
- k. God asks Elijah what He is doing there.
- l. This is one of the few times that Elijah went somewhere without the Lord telling him to go there.
- m. Elijah gives a response that focuses all on the negative:
 - i. They have killed your prophets.
 - ii. I am the only prophet left.

- iii. They want to kill me.
- iv. Elijah says nothing about what happened previously on Mt. Carmel.
- v. Depression seems to follow something awesome that happens.**
- n. Elijah goes outside the cave, and a strong wind passes by.
- o. A wind so strong that the rocks were breaking.
- p. But God is not in the wind.
- q. Then an earthquake but God wasn't in the earthquake.
- r. Then fire but the Lord wasn't in the fire.
- s. Finally, there is the sound of a gently blowing and Elijah immediately knew that was the Lord.
- t. The Lord again asked Elijah what He was doing there, and Elijah gave a repeat answer from verse 10.
- u. Then beginning in verse 15 the Lord gives Elijah further instructions.
- v. Elijah might have wanted God to destroy the Israelites who were unfaithful to Him. Elijah might have wanted the Lord to destroy them with fire, or an earthquake, or a violent wind. God had a better plan.
- w. Many times, we want God to answer our prayers in some magnificent way and that is what we look for. However, God may answer in a small subtle way.
- x. Thing is we are never secluded in a cave. We are busy, busy, busy. We always have noise around us. Take some quiet time.

III. What to do:

- a. Exercise: *Research shows that thirty minutes of moderate daily exercise is very helpful in elevating mood. Find a partner to walk with—it makes it harder to avoid the activity if someone is waiting for you.*⁸
- b. Have a medical checkup.

⁸ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, [*The Quick-Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling: Personal and Emotional Issues*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 76.

- c. If you have recently suffered a loss, give yourself permission to mourn.
- d. Journal. Write out prayers.
- e. Remind yourself that very few situations are really hopeless and very few situations are that bad. Reason with yourself.
- f. Think positive thoughts.
- g. Stay active.
- h. Seek a counselor.
- i. Get support from friends.
- j. Meditate on God's Word.
- k. Learn something new.
- l. Make sure that you are active in your relationship with God. We stay in tune with God through individual and corporate spiritual disciplines.
- m. Practice thanksgiving.

Swindoll writes:

God often delivers His best gifts to us in unexpected ways . . . with surprises inside the wrappings. Through apparent contradictions. Somewhat like the therapy He used when Elijah was so low, so terribly disillusioned.

How did the Lord minister to him? By an earthquake? In a whirlwind? Through a scorching fire? You'd expect all the above since Elijah was such a passionate, hard-charging prophet. But no. The story from [1 Kings 19](#) makes it clear that Jehovah was not in the earthquake or the wind or the fire. Too obvious. Too predictable. That's not the Sovereign's style.

After all the hullabaloo died down, there came "a gentle blowing" and shortly thereafter, ever so softly, "a voice" came to him (vv. 12–13) with words of reassurance and affirmation. Not, "You oughta be ashamed of yourself!" Or "What's a man of your stature doing in a crummy place like this?" None of that. No blame, no shame, no sermon, no name-calling, no blistering rebuke. In contradiction to the popular idea of confrontation (and surely surprising to Elijah himself), the Lord encouraged His friend to go on from there. He gave him a plan to follow, a promise to remember, and a traveling companion to help him make it through the night.

Another mysterious back-door delivery . . . another victim of despair rescued from the pit. No wonder Paul burst forth in praise of God's wisdom and knowledge by exclaiming:

How unsearchable are His judgments . . . [how] unfathomable His ways! ([Romans 11:33b](#))

About the time we think we've got the whole picture in finite focus, an infinite hand quickly grabs the camera, changes lenses on us, points in another direction, and has us take an entirely different picture. Yet to our amazement, when everything is developed, we get the one thing we wanted all our lives through a process we would never have chosen.

*It's like the anonymous poet's profound admission:
I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;
I was made weak, that I might learn to humbly obey.
I asked for health, that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy;
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life;
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for,
But everything I had hoped for.
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.⁹*

Prayer

⁹ Excerpt taken from *Come before Winter and Share My Hope* by Charles R. Swindoll. Copyright © 1985, 1988, 1994 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights reserved worldwide.
<https://insight.org/resources/daily-devotional/individual/contradictory-truths-part-two1>