

The Biblical Perspective on Depression

(1 Kings 19:1-13)

Sunday, November 2, 2025

Depression has become an epidemic in America! Millions of Americans suffer from the misery and sadness of emotional depression. Some years ago, an article in a leading national news magazine stated, “there is no doubt that depression, the leading mental illness in the US, is now virtually an epidemic and suicide is it’s all too frequent outcome!”

The Bible is not silent about this. Christianity is not a pie-in-the-sky philosophy; it is a relationship with a Savior who “became flesh and dwelt among us.” Even in the Old Testament, there are illuminating case studies of God’s pastoral care for specific people with acute needs.

Elijah is such an awesome example. He was one of God’s great Prophets. The moment of truth came in his ministry when he met 450 Prophets of Baal for a duel of prayer on Mount Carmel. The pagan prophets failed, and Elijah succeeded, vindicating the Name of Jehovah God and Elijah’s prophetic ministry. Elijah experienced his greatest spiritual victory that day. But the account does not end there. After this resounding success, Elijah, exhausted and drained, fell into a deep depression.

I. Elijah’s Symptoms! (1 Kings 19:3-4, 9-10)

Elijah presents us with some classic symptoms of the devastation precipitated by emotional depression.

A. Elijah is fearful and anxious! It is said that depressed persons frequently experience a nebulous, generalized sense of malaise. There is a pessimism about the future that causes fear, sometimes without the victim being able to identify

the cause or object of that fear. Elijah feared for his life, even though the greatest threat to him had already been overcome at Mt. Carmel.

B. Elijah is physically and emotionally spent! There are many human experiences that extract a heavy toll on our emotional strength and ability to cope. Physical illness, deep grief, stress from radical changes in our lives, and a multitude of other factors can create the weariness of spirit in which depression thrives.

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C. Elijah is feeling low self-esteem! He states that he wishes he was dead. This feeling of worthlessness that causes people to consider their lives an unnecessary burden to the earth is common in depression. Elijah seems to feel guilty and ashamed about being tired and afraid, and he cannot forgive himself for this human frailty.

D. He indulges in self-pity! Depressed people generally do not need the pity of their friends because they are so enthusiastic in their own production of pity for themselves. This private “pity party” is common in depression.

E. Elijah is feeling lonely and rejected! There is a sense that no one really cares or understands. He feels rejected by his countrymen. Rejection, genuine or perceived, delivers a destructive blow to the human personality, and depression is often the response.

F. Elijah becomes critical of other people and hostile toward them! Depression involves guilt that causes self-depreciation and anger that leads to criticism of others. Elijah is convinced that all others have forsaken God, and they want to destroy him.

So, God’s great prophet huddles alone in a cave, praying to die and trying to sleep away what remains of his miserable existence. But Elijah is not alone! The Holy God of the Universe peers through the darkness of the cave, and His gaze even penetrates the shadowing gloom of the depressed soul. He cares and He acts! With love and firmness, God ministers to Elijah!

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II. God's Therapy! (1 Kings 19:5-8, 11-13)

God sends an Angel to minister to Elijah. The Creator of human beings seems to have a remarkable understanding of how they work and what they need. The Angel confronts Elijah with specific therapeutic instructions. Elijah is instructed to perform several significant actions.

A. Get up and take care of yourself! Depression creates a kind of paralysis that causes people to become neglectful of the most basic daily tasks. Elijah has stopped eating, and he must be told to feed himself. Some depressed people will try to medicate themselves by stuffing their bodies with food; others will attempt to starve themselves. Elijah is the latter. Proper nutrition is an important part of overcoming depression.

Depressed people often must be encouraged to engage in a productive daily routine. They may stop taking care of their daily hygiene, become lazy and retreat into a hypnotic obsession with watching television or social media. The person who speaks for God may need to say, "GET UP," and stop neglecting the basic tasks you should be doing. The person who says this, takes a big risk for sure, but we are called to be courageous in our care of others.

Of course, a key component of getting help is to get medical attention. Sometimes all the prayer in the world will not help a depressed person until he or she gets the proper medication to correct whatever has caused the depression.

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B. Busy yourself with productive activity! God gave Elijah specific instructions about his future ministry and the selection of his successor. Depressed people need assignments to complete. A sense of accomplishment can reverse the downward spiral of worthless feelings. When a person lacks inner motivation, the necessary motivation to keep on living may need to come from external sources. God cared enough about Elijah to provide a discipline for him during the time when he lacked the inner strength to discipline himself.

C. Renew your relationship with God! We see Elijah meeting God in a new way and hearing the still small voice that speaks forgiveness and love. Depressed persons need to be reminded that God is still present with them and that He has a word for them. His coming to them may be a whisper rather than an earthquake, but that is just as real for those who are willing to listen carefully.

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D. Admit your limitations and get help! Elijah became a healthier human being because he begins to understand and accept his own humanity. He sees that he needs help, and God has help available for him. There were still seven thousand who had not forsaken God, and they represented potential support for Elijah. But that support was not operative for Elijah's benefit until he admitted that he needed it. The depressed person who refuses to accept help in the midst of his or her misery is not strong or admirable; they, in fact are unrealistic and self-destructive.

- Because we are children of an Omnipotent Father, we can have hope!
- Because unique resources are available to the Christian, we can have hope!
- Even as we confront the hellish demon of depression, we can have hope!