

Christ our Refuge: Bring my Soul out of Prison

Psalm 142

THERE ARE NO SUPER SAINTS!

That is the first lesson of our look at David tonight. We all struggle with the same challenges in life—that is the message of James 5.17.

James 5:17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

The only other time this word “with a nature like people of Lystra (Acts 14:15_ they were human and not divine. Sometimes we need to realize the same thing. God’s greatest servants—David, Paul, and Elijah are made of the same stuff we are. Their greatness is of God not of themselves.

GOD WANTS TO USE US

Life is hard, and people all around us struggle.

Here is what one wife and mother who was active in church, had a wonderful home and marriage once said

Eyes get red from weeping. The heavy weights of sorrow press down. Depression, that serpent of despair, slithers silently through the soul’s back door.

Depression is
Debilitating, defeating,
Deepening gloom.

Trudging wearily through
The grocery store,
Unable to make a simple choice,
Or to count out correct change.

Surveying an unbelievably messy house,
Piles of laundry,
Work undone, and not being
Able to lift a finger.

Doubting that God cares,
Doubting in my prayers,
Doubting He's even there.

Sitting, staring wild-eyed into space,
Desperately wanting out of the
Human race.¹

So how can God use us? By each of us learning from the Scriptures and then applying them to our own lives. To start tonight, turn back again to I Thessalonians 5. In this chapter there are at least more imperative commands than any other paragraph in God's Word. It is one of the clearest descriptions of the basic duties of a believer in Christ's church.

Why not underline or circle these commands we are to present ourselves as willing servants to our Master to fulfill?

1 Thessalonians 5:11-26

1. v.11a Therefore **comfort each other** and
2. v. 11b **edify one another**, just as you also are doing. 12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.
3. v. 13b **Be at peace** among yourselves.
4. v. 14a Now we exhort you, brethren, **warn** those who are unruly,
5. v. 14b **comfort** the fainthearted,
6. v. 14c **uphold** the weak,
7. v. 14d **be patient** with all.
8. v. 15a **See that no one renders evil** for evil to anyone,
9. v. 15b but **always pursue** what is good both for yourselves and for all.
10. v. 16 **Rejoice** always,
11. v. 17 **pray** without ceasing,

¹ Swindoll, Encourage Me, pp.

12. v. 18 **in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
13. v. 19 **Do not quench** the Spirit.
14. v. 20 **Do not despise** prophecies.
15. v. 21a **Test** all things;
16. v. 21b **hold fast** what is good.
17. v. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.
18. v. 25 Brethren, **pray** for us.
19. v. 26 **Greet** all the brethren with a holy kiss.

Now, go back three thousand years ago, into the harsh conditions of the cave of Adullam we can start to see the emotional and physical furnace of adversity and affliction that David had entered.

DAVID'S SECRET

Tonight as we open to Psalm 142 we find David's testimony that explains how he kept from being sidelined and paralyzed by depression. This is a divine insight into something as James said that we are all "subject to like passions".

David wrote down how God helped him to not get his life and emotions dragged down by those around him. As we read these verses note the emotional condition of everyone that joined up with David. They were a very needy group. And in all their need, they invaded the life of someone just coming out of the pits. It was just the right recipe for a relapse by David into despair and a return into the pits. But the good news is—that didn't happen, and the reason why is just what we are going to learn from God's Word.

What did this tough crowd around David do to him? They depressed him! How did David, so prone to doubt, discouragement and depression—overcome this hard, troublesome time? Psalm 142 holds the key!

Trapped in a cave, David baby sat four hundred fellow fugitives. That's his address in Psalm 142. From the cave of Adullam, tired, weary, distressed, and depressed--David looks up and discovers some great truths about God. So can we.

Please listen to David's cry from the cave in Psalm 142:

Psalm 142:1-7

1 I cry out to the Lord with my voice; With my voice to the Lord I make my supplication.
2 I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble. 3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk They have secretly set a snare for me. 4 Look on my right hand and see, For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul. 5 I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, "You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living.
6 Attend to my cry, For I am brought very low; Deliver me from my persecutors, For they are stronger than I. 7 Bring my soul out of prison, That I may praise Your name; The righteous shall surround me, For You shall deal bountifully with me."

What simple lessons can we find in cave times? ***Use lonely times to grow.***

One of the greatest truths we can discover is that these lonely cave times, when we feel trapped and imprisoned by our circumstances and emotions--usually accomplish great discoveries about God.

David is at the depth of loneliness. He has been on the run for years and now he is hiding in a desolate cave in a crowd of malcontents, feeling very much alone. He has two choices. Stay in the cave of loneliness, descend into self-pity and sin or look up and use the time alone to grow.

Psalm 142 is the classic confession of David when he was a caveman, alone and depressed. God satisfied him completely as he discovered great things about God. Remember, a heart that flees to God for refuge, will always be satisfied.

That is the summary of the Life of David. What do we find as we examine the life of David? DAVID was always fleeing to Christ as his refuge. In this overview of the dark days in David's life, we see how his needs were always met by the Lord..

1. **Cave times are usually accompanied by great distress.** (v. 3-4) Psalm 142:3-4 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk They have

secretly set a snare for me. 4 Look on my right hand and see,
For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed
me; No one cares for my soul.

In the middle of great troubles there are usually some associated
symptoms of depression.

- David felt **overwhelmed in spirit** (v.3a): "Roof caving
in!"; "Everything going wrong at once!"; "Always happens
to me!"; "Not now!"; "I have some bad news".
- David thought his adversaries had **hidden a trap for me**
(v.3b): "They're all after me"; "I've been railroaded";
"Framed".
- David feared that **no one regards me** (v.4a): "No one
called..."; "I'm a nobody"; "Poor me..."; "I'm all alone".
- David also feared that there was **no escape for me**
(v.4b): "One-way trip to nowhere"; "You're TOO old"; "I'm
sorry but the qualifications for this position..."
- Finally, David felt that **no one cares for my soul** (v.4c).
Have you ever let THESE DEADENING THOUGHT CROSS
YOUR MIND? They will bring gloom as fast as a storm front
in a summer thunderstorm. But hold on –

2. **Cave times usually accomplish great discoveries about
God** (v. 5-7) Psalm 142:5-7 I cried out to You, O Lord: I said,
"You are **my** refuge, **My** portion in the land of the living. 6
Attend to **my** cry, For I am brought very low; Deliver **me** from
my persecutors, For they are stronger than I. **7 Bring my soul
out of prison**, That I may praise Your name; The righteous shall
surround me, For You shall deal bountifully with me."

**Cave times open ways we never dreamed of for knowing God
intimately.** As we look there, why don't you take a moment and mark
these for someone else who may need them someday. Or even for you
if you ever feel the twinge of depression in your life. Look now and
find:

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true REFUGE (any
time, any where) Psalm 142:5a: **depression means its time to
flee to the Lord my Refuge.** I will believe Your promise and
turn to You as my Refuge right now.

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true PORTION
(just what I need). Psalm 142:5b: **depression means its time
to feed on the Lord my Portion.** I will believe Your promise to

be all I need in this hard time.

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true LISTENER (who cares and hears). Psalm 142:6 'Give heed my cry': ***depression means its time to speak to the Lord my Master.*** I will believe Your promise and pour out all my troubles to You who care for me.

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true DELIVERER (comes and helps) "bring" Psalm 142:7a: ***depression means its time to trust in the Lord my Redeemer.*** I will believe Your promise and let You rescue me now.

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true OBJECT OF WORSHIP (loves and accepts my worship) Psalm 142:7b: ***depression means its time to offer worship to the Lord my Lord.*** I will believe Your promise and worship You even when I don't feel like it.

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true PROVIDER "surround" Psalm 142:7c: ***depression means its time to rest in the Lord my Provider.*** I will believe Your promise and let You surround me now with everything I need.

Cave life yields great discoveries about God. David sings them in Psalm 142. Listen to the confessions of this caveman:

- "Lord of Refuge, You are my Portion" (v.5),
- "O Listening One, hear my cry and Rescue me (v.6).
- "My God who Provides the righteous to gather about me, You are Sufficient" (v. 7).

3. ***Cave times allow us to apply what we know is true about our God!*** Now to the conclusion as the caveman confesses the end result of acting upon these great discoveries about God that he made in **Psalm 57**. Do you remember them from last time? David applies all those truths to his heart!

- v.1a – **God is Gracious** (Exodus 33:12 – 34:6), that means that God is gracious to even save us we are so sinful...and He has done so much more than that!
- v.1b – **God is Refuge**. He said it is Psalm 142:5, He says it here...Look at Psalm 91. God is our shelter, protection, covering and shade. The cross is our safe harbor Hebrews 6:19 – anchored!
- v.2 – **God is able—He accomplishes.**

- v. 4/6. Interlude – enemy without because enemy within
- v.5 Solution –focus on God. **God saves.**
- v.7a – **God Establishes.** See Psalm 40 5x He....Inclined to me, heard my cry, brought me up, Set my feet, Put a new song.
- v.7b – **God makes us praise** through sorrow
- v.8-9 – **God makes us thankful**
- v.9b – **God opens an audience to us...**
- v. 10 – **God is loyal.** Lamentations 3 - mercies fail not.
- v.11 – God uses our adoring His name--to pull us out of the cave to Him!

Martin Luther, commented on the psalmist: “David must have been plagued by a very fearful devil. He could not have had such profound insights if he had not experienced great assaults.’ Luther felt that those who are predisposed to fall into despondency as well as to rise into ecstasy may be able to view reality from an angle different from that of ordinary folk.” [Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 361]

Some practical steps to overcome depression are these:

1. **Deal with sin.** Be sure that there is no unconfessed or unforsaken sin left in your life to give the Devil a place in your life. (Eph. 4:27)
2. **Share your burdens.** Clearly tell the Lord all your fears, all your struggles, all your pains—remember that He knows our frame that we are dust. (Psalm 103)
3. **Abandon all self-pity.** Constant self-sorrow is a one way ticket to loneliness. Self-pity denies we have a responsibility to deal with our emotions and thus frustrates any cure. As Jesus said, coming after Him means we deny our self (Luke 9:23).

James 5:17 reminds us that Elijah was “a man of like passions,” a man of clay subject to the same trials and failures as any believer. How strange that Elijah should face 850 angry prophets and not be afraid, and then run away from the threats of one woman! Certainly there was a physical cause to his failure: the great contest on Mt. Carmel had undoubtedly wearied Elijah and drained him emotionally. Christians would do well to take better care of their bodies, especially after times of intense ministry and sacrifice (cf. Mark 6:31). But the main cause for Elijah’s failure was spiritual: he saw Jezebel and failed to see the Lord; he listened to Jezebel’s threats and forgot to wait for

God's promises. In every step he had taken, Elijah had waited for God's command (17:2, 8; 18:1, 36), but now his fear led to impatience, and impatience led to disobedience (Isa. 28:16). He was no longer risking his life for God's glory; rather, he was trying to save his life for his own sake.²

This may be encouraging to us even in common cases, if we consider that Elijah was *a man of like passions with us*. He was a zealous good man and a very great man, but he had his infirmities, and was subject to disorder in his passions as well as others. In prayer we must not look to the merit of man, but to the grace of God. Only in this we should copy after Elijah, that he prayed earnestly, or, as it is in the original, *in prayer he prayed*. It is not enough to say a prayer, but we must pray in prayer. Our thoughts must be fixed, our desires firm and ardent, and our graces in exercise; and, when we thus pray in prayer, we shall speed in prayer. Elijah *prayed that it might not rain*; and God heard him in his pleading against an idolatrous persecuting country, so that it *rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months*. *Again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain*, etc. Thus you see prayer is the key which opens and shuts heaven. To this there is an allusion, Rev. 11:6, where the two witnesses are said to have power *to shut heaven, that it rain not*. This instance of the extraordinary efficacy of prayer is recorded for encouragement even to ordinary Christians to be instant and earnest in prayer. God never says to any of the seed of Jacob, *Seek my face in vain*. If Elijah by prayer could do such great and wonderful things, surely the prayers of no righteous man shall return void. Where there may not be so much of a miracle in God's answering our prayers, yet there may be as much of grace.³

Oftentimes, the great characters of the Bible the Abraham's and the Elijahs and the Paul's—are considered as *super saints* with halos around their heads to whom most people can't relate. But Elijah was no *super saint*—he was a man. That truth will be graphically illustrated over and over again throughout these studies. He was a man with feelings. As a matter of fact, James 5:17 says it this way: "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are" Or simply stated, one could say, "Elijah was a man just like us" He had problems. I don't know if he was single or married, but if he was single, he faced the problems of loneliness; if he was married, he faced the problems of providing for a wife and kids. He was a man

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, (InterVarsity Press: IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament) Downer's Grove, IL.

³Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

just like us. And it's good to keep that in mind at the beginning of this series of studies. Hence, the title of this chapter "Elijah: A Person Like You." The difference in Elijah was not in his **genes**, but in his **faith**. He was a man who was sold out to God. He had failings. And you'll be able to identify with him along the way in some of the things that he did. But even though he was made of the same *stuff* as we are, what a challenge he is to us in the way he believed God!

Secondly, he was a man who lived in the presence of God. Look at 1 Ki 17:1 again: "... As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand ..." Elijah was living in the presence of God. He was standing in His presence and speaking with His authority. As a matter of fact, James 5:17 says, "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, **and he prayed**" You see, that's the difference between Elijah and us. It's not that his nature was different than ours; it's that we have not learned to pray like he prayed. That's the difference. He was a man, but he was a man who stood in the presence of God.

ELIJAH DESPONDENT

"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life ..." (1 Ki. 19:1-3).

How could it happen that a man who had been fearless and undaunted could then lose that courage and begin to run for his life? However, such an experience often happens with the child of God. A psychologist would call it despondency. Oftentimes, after a believer's greatest spiritual victories, he finds himself in what John Bunyan called the "Slough of Despond." A Christian should not be surprised if, after some great spiritual victory, a strange period of despondency arrives on the scene.

After this great spiritual experience on the mountaintop, Ahab told his wicked wife, Jezebel, what Elijah had done. She was the hand that ruled her weak-kneed husband. She wasn't impressed with the report, but replied, "I'm not afraid of him. In 24 hours, he's going to be dead" (paraphrased).

And then a strange thing transpired. This man of God, who was willing to stand up before the prophets of Baal, in the sight of the nation, turned one hundred eighty degrees and took off in the opposite

direction.

Verse 3: "And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there."

Beer-sheba is in the southern part of present-day Israel—150 miles from Jezreel! There he left his servant, but he kept going.

19:4: "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree. And he requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is enough! Now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

Why did he leave his servant there and keep going? In simple terms, he was quitting the prophetic ministry. He was not planning on coming back to what he considered to be a land that was wicked beyond help. Then after another day's journey, he sat down under a juniper tree and asked God to take his life.

What in the world happened? Where is the Elijah of Mount Carmel? Where is the Elijah who stood before Ahab and pointed his finger toward him and said, "It's not going to rain for three years until I say so!" Are we reading about the same man?

Right after a great spiritual experience is the time when Satan's attacks are the strongest. When I was a pastor, it would happen like this. After a wonderful service of blessing at church, our family would pull out of the church parking lot, and about one-half mile down the road one of the kids would become sick in the car! What a way to deflate a spiritual bubble! There is a saying, "a pastor resigns from his church every Monday." That may not be true, but many pastors can identify with the feeling!

That's what happened to Elijah. He is on the mountaintop with God, and then a few hours later, after his great spiritual experience, he's leaving town and running from one woman. Simply stated, Elijah looked at circumstances and not at the Lord. When he first stood fearlessly before Ahab his eyes were on the Lord. At the lonely brook Cherith, his eyes were on the Lord. And then when he came down, he got his eyes on Jezebel. When we take our eyes off the Lord and look at the circumstances, we become candidates for despondency.

You recall that when Peter was walking on the water, he had his eyes on the Lord, but when he saw the wind and the waves, what happened? Splash (Mt. 14:24–33)!

God used a tremendous therapy with Elijah. Verse 5–7: “And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee.” Despondency or despair does not always come from spiritual or emotional causes. Oftentimes, it simply comes from physical causes—lack of sleep or poor eating habits. Satan often attacks us when we’re tired. That was the first step in the Lord’s therapeutic treatment of Elijah’s despondency. Before He ever ministered to Elijah’s spirit, He ministered to Elijah’s body. There are some sincere Christian *workaholics* who boast “I would rather bum out than rust out.” Such an attitude may sound very pious, but the truth of the matter is that *burning out* and *rusting out* are not the only two choices for the servant of the Lord to make. Such a choice sounds like the following: “Well, you’re going to die so choose which way you want it—by the knife or by gun!”

There must be a balance where we can both abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58) and also come apart... and rest a while (Mk. 6:31). If we don’t learn how to *come apart*, then we will soon do just that—*come apart!*

ELIJAH DEPRESSED

“And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God”(1 Ki 19:8). He kept on going! He had gone 150 miles to Beer-sheba and then he kept on going to the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula where Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai, was located. This was 300 miles away from Jezreel and Jezebel. He came to Mount Sinai, the place where Moses, one of his illustrious predecessors, received the law from God; the place where Israel had made a covenant with God. Why would he go there? I believe he went there because he had given up on Israel. He wanted God to renew His covenant with him alone and start a new people, just as He had done with Moses 700 years before. In other words, what God had intended to do with Moses but didn’t, Elijah now desires to be done with him (Ex. 32:9–14).

Verse 9: “And he came there unto a cave [the same cave where Moses was covered by God’s hand in Ex. 33:22?], and lodged there; and,

behold, the word of the Lord came to him” You’ll notice how that is the first time in this passage that the word of God came to Elijah. In 1 Kings 17:2, 8 and 18:1, the Bible says “the word of the Lord came unto him,” but in 19:3, it doesn’t say that. Elijah was disobedient to God in running away from Jezebel. He was not following the word of the Lord as he had at previous times.

He’s had some food, he’s had some rest, so he can now think clearly. So God begins to deal with his spiritual problem.

Verse 9: “... What doest thou here, Elijah?” In other words, “Elijah, why are you here? You ought to be in Israel. The people there are perishing for lack of knowledge, and you’re in the wrong place.” verse 10: “... I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts. For the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”

There is Elijah’s depression. And now, he’s in the grips of it because he’s filled with self-pity. “I’m the only one left. And I’ve done a pretty good job, too. You’ve seen what I’ve done, Lord. I stood up to the prophets of Baal. I’ve stood up to Ahab” (paraphrased). Do you notice the number of I’s? Elijah was a great man of God. Don’t misunderstand me. My criticism of him is not because I have arrived, but because God had recorded it here for us to learn from it and appreciate it. This great man of God had taken his eyes off the Lord and started feeling sorry for himself. Have you ever felt sorry for yourself—a *pity party*, as it’s called, and you’re the only one invited? That’s the mark of depression and despondency. “And I, even I only, am left.” Elijah was in the real throes of depression, and he was useless to God. He was 300 miles away from the place that he ought to be, feeling sorry for himself. Elijah was despondent under a juniper tree; he was depressed in a cave; now notice that Elijah was delivered before the Lord.

ELIJAH DELIVERED

The Lord dealt with him in verses 11 and 12: “...Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent 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 a still, small voice.” Wind, earthquakes, fire—all symbols of

God's mighty power, and Elijah had known that type of ministry. He had been the one who had thundered, who had blown, who had quaked. He had been a man of power, but somehow, God was teaching him a lesson here. God was not in any of these things, but He was very present in a "still, small voice."

God desires both great and small ministry for Him. What was He teaching Elijah by showing him these noisy manifestations of nature followed by a quiet word? Great natural catastrophes like those mentioned can quickly destroy men's lives, but only the "still, small voice" of the Holy Spirit can regenerate men through the patient teaching of the Word. Elijah's problem was shared by the two disciples of Jesus who wanted a Samaritan village, which had refused them hospitality, to be destroyed by fire from Heaven—Elijah style! They were rebuked by the Savior for their wrong spirit (Lk. 9:55). In the same way, God does not always work in such outward displays of vengeance. Elijah's new type of ministry was to be of the "still, small voice" variety, in contrast to the preceding dramatic measures.

God uses all of His children in varying ways. Verse 13 and 14: "And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." Now God begins to deal with His depressed prophet. Verses 18: "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." With that answer, He dealt with Elijah's excuse—"I'm the only one left." In effect, God said to His prophet: "You are not indispensable, Elijah, you're not the only one. And if you go and do something else and forsake the prophetic ministry, I may just get one of those 7,000 to do it. Don't think that you're a privileged character with God." Don't think that because you suppose you are the only one doing the work, that you have some sort of special privilege.

Dear reader, don't think that you're indispensable to God. You may be in the throes of despondency and despair simply because you are convinced that you have to carry the whole weight of some responsibility.

God wants us to serve Him all the time. Now, how does God deal with the depression of Elijah? Verses 15–17: “And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu, the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel. And Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy stead. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael, shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu, shall Elisha slay.” He told Elijah to do three things: Anoint a king of Syria, anoint Jehu as king of Israel, and anoint Elisha as his (Elijah’s) successor. One of the greatest problems with depressed people is that they have lost their willingness to serve the Lord. They are sitting around doing nothing, feeling sorry for themselves. One of the best therapies is simply to get busy. The cure for Elijah’s depression was to get his eyes on the Lord, to recognize that he was not indispensable, and then to get busy and stop feeling sorry for himself. Get your focus outward and not inward. Get your eyes off yourself and get them on the Lord. Get your eyes off the problems and on the tasks at hand. Get busy for the Lord and stop feeling sorry for yourself. That’s the best therapy you can have. Elijah did that, and thank God, because of his tremendous deliverance at the hand of the Lord, his ministry was not over. Because he was delivered from this abominable depression, much of his greatest ministry still lay ahead. True, it was a different type of ministry. Gone were the days of Mount Carmel, but Elijah was not to be *put on the shelf*. The inspired admonition of the apostle will serve well to close this chapter of Elijah’s life. “And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).⁴

ELIJAH'S DEPRESSION

Elijah traveled on foot about 95 miles to the southern border of Judah. Then he went another day's journey into the wilderness. By that time he was completely exhausted. He had remarkable physical strength and endurance, but he had extended himself to the breaking point. He had first prepared for the "showdown" with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. There was great pressure on him because of satanic opposition while he was on the mountain. Then it was necessary to kill the prophets of Baal. Such invasion of Satan's territory is not done easily. Then Elijah prayed for rain with great earnestness, and finally he ran about 16 miles to Jezreel to see what results would follow the great triumph at Mount Carmel. All of this took place in one day.

⁴Varner W. , *The Chariot of Israel*, (Bellmawr, New Jersey: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.) 1997.

Satan knows that a tired body is an added opportunity for him, and he took advantage of it in this case. When Jezebel threatened Elijah, he seemed to lose control and continued running until he sat under the juniper tree in the wilderness.

Then he requested that he might die. He felt his labors had been fruitless. He longed for rest. "It is enough," he said (1 Kings 19:4). He had hoped to see a great revival, but no spiritual change had taken place in Israel.

Some men in the Bible went even further than Elijah did in discouragement. Jeremiah said, "Cursed be the day wherein I was born" (Jeremiah 20:14). Job wished that the day of his birth might perish (see Job 3:3). These men all had natures like ours. They showed what they could be when God filled them and controlled them and also what they were when left to themselves. If we did not have this knowledge, we would be tempted to think they were superhuman instead of ordinary people like the rest of us.

God knew that His servant had overtaxed himself and needed a renewal of his physical life as well as his spiritual life. Our inner life is very sensitive to our outward condition. Rest is very important to all of us. Proper exercise is also important. We sometimes forget this, but God does not. Our physical condition can influence our spiritual condition.

Elijah felt very much alone. He admitted this to God: "I, even I only, am left" (v. 10). Loneliness is sometimes a penalty that people pay for being great. Someone sent me the following paragraph:

When Elijah had his eyes on the Lord, he faced his foes without fear. But the moment he forgot God and concentrated on the circumstances, things changed. He looked at the danger and lost his courage. Centuries later Peter did the same thing. As long as he looked at the Lord, he walked on the water and was not afraid. The moment he looked at the waves, he became afraid and began to sink.

God looked on His servant Elijah with kindness and provided food for him. The Lord did not forget him. He followed him everywhere. Elijah learned as we should learn: "He [God] hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our

transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:10-14).

Elijah had lost hope of seeing the people of Israel return to the Lord. Thus life no longer was attractive to him. When hope is gone, life is not worth living. Perhaps it seemed to Elijah that the Lord had given up also, but this was not the case. The Lord did not answer the prayer of His discouraged servant when he asked to die.

The present world has no answer to the turmoil and strife going on in its midst, but the Church is not without hope. Our hope lies in the coming of our Lord. This we must never forget.

This is what He did for Elijah. "And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee" (1 Kings 19:5-7).

Elijah still had a great distance to go, but God watched over him as he slept. He was not forsaken but was provided for through rest and food for a journey that would cover many more miles. Here we have a demonstration of the ministry of angels to those who are the elect of the Lord. God's tender care is expressed through the ministry of angels, who are servants of those who are heirs of salvation. The same angels who delight to witness God's majesty and greatness also enjoy ministering to God's saints on the earth.

This action on the part of God is typical of His nature as the God of grace. He takes no account of our worthiness or unworthiness. His grace is free and sovereign. He loves His own, and He loves them to the end.

Can you imagine an angel doing such a lowly task as cooking a meal for a discouraged saint of God, when that angel's regular assignment was to stand in the presence of almighty God and see Him in His majesty and glory? There was no grumbling on the part of this messenger. He loved to do what he did.

At times each of us feels that a different environment would make things easier for us. We will see, in Elijah's case, what a change in environment did for him, though he could have had the same experience if he had stayed in Israel. God did not forsake him. Elijah needed spiritual refreshing. He needed to get away from the duties of life for a while and be alone with the Lord. Our Savior did this quite often when he prayed.

God allowed his servant to take this long, hard journey across the desert and in grace provided for him and accompanied him. Whether or not Elijah was actually doing God's will at this time, his motive was certainly that of seeking to put God first. The Lord did not forsake him, and He will not forsake us.

We read in 1 Kings 19:8 that Elijah "arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God." Again Elijah experienced the superhuman strength provided by the Lord.

Like Elijah we all have times of discouragement. None of us are immune. Pastors are often targets of the enemy in this respect. They preach faithfully for the Lord but see little response, if any, in the hearts of the hearers. Less important things begin to take the time of the members of their congregation. Sunday night attendance dwindles. People have little interest in prayer meetings. And the average Christian seems to have lost his zeal for witnessing to those who are unsaved.

Regardless of the cause of our discouragement, let us learn from Elijah's experience that God is never discouraged. He never gives up. When God has given us the responsibility for some work or obligation, let us learn not to give up either.

Sometimes God's plans do not coincide with our plans. Not all of His plans are short range; many of them are long range. Though he did not realize it at the time, Elijah was fitting into part of God's long-range plan for Israel.

GOD'S LOVE FOR ELIJAH

When Elijah was discouraged, he received God's love in a very special way. God did not rebuke His tired and depressed servant but provided food, rest, protection, comfort and strength through an angel.

If he had not learned it before, Elijah learned that God's love is constant. Perhaps he may have feared that he had forfeited that love by running away from Jezebel and her threats, but God still loved him. The love of God never changes, even though our awareness of it does. The sun still shines even though it may disappear from view behind clouds or appear to go down at night.

The love of God is like that. We may not always be aware of God's love, but it surrounds us. Circumstances may surround us like a cloud or like night, but God's love is not changed. It is still with us⁵.

It is often suggested that Elijah was suffering from depression. Depression can have many different causes (from suppressed anger to vitamin deficiency) and we should not assume that when we are depressed our problem is the same as Elijah's, or his the same as ours. In his case, depression and discouragement seem to have stemmed from his skewed perspective. He both underrated his own achievement and undervalued the contribution of others. The answer, in part at least, was for him to be given a glimpse of things from God's point of view. We need such glimpses too, if we are not to become discouraged in the Christian life.⁶

⁵ Theodore Epp, *Elijah*, Back to the Bible pamphlet.

⁶ Carson, D.A.; et al., *The New Bible Commentary*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press) 1994.