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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

I've been preaching on Sunday evenings throughout the Old Testament this year. We've come to a character named Elijah. The last time I preached about him I talked about "The Great God Contest on Mt. Carmel" where Elijah said, "If Baal is god, let him answer by fire but if Jehovah, Lord God of Israel is really God let him answer by fire," and God showed He was the only living God! You may think after a great spiritual victory like that everything would have been great for Elijah but we find him in the pit of depression so today I want to talk to you about God's prescription for depression! Have you ever seen a doctor write a prescription? Sometimes you can't read it, can you? I'm glad pharmacists can read it but God's prescription tonight is going to be so clear, anybody can read it!

Do you think you've had a bad day? I heard about a man who was injured while working on a job and this is how he filled out his accident report: "I was laying bricks for a wall at a project and when I finished the top of the wall, there were some extra bricks. Not wanting to drop the bricks and risk breaking them, I fixed a pulley out on a beam. I ran a rope through the pulley down to a barrel on the ground. I pulled the barrel up to the top of the wall and tied off the rope on the ground. I climbed up on the scaffold and I loaded the extra bricks into the wooden barrel. I then climbed down grabbed the rope and untied it. I was going to lower the barrel of bricks to the ground not realizing that the barrel of bricks was heavier than me! The barrel came down and I was jerked off the ground by the rope! I didn't have the presence of mind to let go so I hung on and then it was too late on the way up I collided with the falling barrel of bricks and it gashed my shoulder. Then, when I was pulled to the top, I jammed my fingers into the pulley and when the barrel hit the ground, the bottom of the barrel broke the bricks fell out suddenly the barrel was lighter than me! So I went down and the barrel came up. On the way down I collided with the barrel again bruising my legs. I fell right on top of the pile of broken bricks causing multiple cuts and bruises. At that point I completely lost my cool and let go of the rope—that's when the barrel fell on me and hit me on the head causing a cut that required 15 stitches!" Now that is a bad day!

When you have a bad day and you feel a little discouraged and a little depressed, God's Word has something to say to you! If you have gone through times of depression, you're not alone. Abraham Lincoln, Charles Spurgeon, Winston Churchill, and even the wife of Billy Graham, Ruth Bell Graham have all experienced deep periods of depression in their lives. How do you know if you are really depressed? Dr. Wayne Oates, a clinical psychiatrist out of Louisville, Kentucky, asks ten questions. He says if your answer is "yes" to seven of these ten questions, chances are you are someone who is depressed.

1. Have you suddenly or slowly lost all initiative in relating to other people?
2. Do you experience repeated crying spells that have no apparent cause?
3. Have you persistently over a period of weeks awakened suddenly and been unable to return to sleep for over an hour?
4. Do you awaken in the morning feeling tired and face the day with dread?
5. Do you feel pain of an unspecific, scattered kind an aching all over?
6. Do you find yourself thinking about your own death? Wishing life were over?
7. Do you breathe irregularly sigh repeatedly and feel heavy in the chest?

8. Do you distrust your own wisdom have trouble making decisions or feel generally helpless?
9. Do you find yourself irritable, cross without any reason?
10. Do you have trouble being enthusiastic about anything?

Dr. Wayne Oates says if you answered “yes” to seven or more of those questions, chances are you are clinically depressed. But I want to say again if you are depressed or if you go through periods of depression, don’t worry because even some of the greatest saints of God in the Bible went through periods of depression. That’s where we find Elijah. Right after this great victory on Mt. Carmel we see him going through a time of depression.

1 Kings 19:3-8. “Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree [juniper tree] 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.’ Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat.’ He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back a second time [the grammar indicates this was some time later] and touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.’ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.”

I. ELIJAH WAS PHYSICALLY EXHAUSTED

Now as far as Elijah knew, he was closing his eyes never to open them again, because he asked God to kill him. Did you know that it is easy to get depressed? just like Elijah got depressed. We’re going to see tonight that it is possible to be depressed when you are physically drained or you may be emotionally depleted or even spiritually defeated. So first of all I want us to look at Elijah because he is physically drained. The first thing God said to Elijah was, “Get up! Get up! I will feed you.” Sometimes you get depressed when you just don’t take care of yourself physically. The first problem Elijah had was that he had run apparently non-stop from Mt. Carmel all the way to Beersheba about 160 miles out in the desert. He had run and run and run and run and rushed and he was totally exhausted! He had not eaten right; he had not gotten enough sleep; he was thirsty; he was completely physically drained. The Bible teaches that if you don’t take care of your body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, it affects your emotions. It will affect you in other ways other than physically and that was his problem.

God said, “Elijah, get up! Don’t lay there and have a ‘pity party!’ Get up!” Every time I read where it talks about the prayer Elijah prayed, “Lord, take my life, that’s enough” I recall a pastor who pastored a church I served in Alabama, the First Baptist Church of Oneonta, Alabama. His name was B.F. Dykes Benjamin Franklin Dykes—no relative of mine as far as I know. In 1936 he was preaching at First Baptist Church of Oneonta on this text where Elijah said, “It is enough, Lord. Let me die.” and Dr. B.F. Dykes walked down out of the pulpit and right there in front of the pulpit fell over dead! You say, “How terrible!” Not if you’re a preacher of the gospel. I can’t think of any other way I’d rather die after preaching the word of God! Apparently, God answered

that prayer for B.F. Dykes but he didn't answer the prayer for Elijah. He said, "Elijah, I'm not through with you! Don't just lay there feeling sorry for yourself." Sometimes when you are depressed, you don't want to do anything. You don't want to get out of bed; you don't want to go anywhere—you just want to lay around.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, was a man who believed in activity and serving God with diligence. One time he went to see a man who was having his own personal "pity party" and wouldn't get out of bed. And this man said to John Wesley, "Brother Wesley, would you just pray that God would give me strength to get out of this bed?" John Wesley said, "You get one foot out of the bed, and I'll pray for the other foot!" That's what God was saying. He was saying, "Elijah, don't just lay there! Get up! Get up!" and he fed him. You're going to see there are three things God gave Elijah when he was physically drained.

1. God's Prescription: Sleep

The first thing God gave Elijah was sleep. He said, "You need to take care of yourself and get enough sleep—but I don't want you to stay sleeping; I want you to get up!" If you are not getting enough rest, it builds up and it accumulates and you go deeper and deeper into what's called "sleep deficit." Before you know it you're going through a time of depression and part of the problem is you are just not taking care of your body. You are not getting enough rest.

2. God's Prescription: Eat

Do you know the second thing he did? Not only did he give him sleep, he gave him the right food to eat. He fed him! Sometimes when you are depressed it could be you are just not eating right. You are not taking care of your nourishment. God fed him some kind of cake and gave him water to drink. He said, "Elijah. You're exhausted! You're worn out! You're depressed! And that's causing you to think wrong and ask for the wrong things. Why are you asking me to kill you? Get enough sleep. Eat correctly."

3. God's Prescription: Exercise

The third thing he did was exercise. "So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights." God said, "Not only do I want you to get enough sleep, and eat correctly "He said, "I want you to exercise." Now if there is somebody in this room who is going through a time of depression, God's prescription for you may be as simple as that. Get enough rest, eat right and try walking every day for forty days. If you are going through a time of depression, you will find that physically at least you feel much, much better.

II. ELIJAH WAS SPIRITUALLY DEFEATED

The second thing God said was, "When you are spiritually defeated, I will speak to you."

1 Kings 19:9-13. "There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken

down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.’ The Lord said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.’ Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’”

What are you doing here, Elijah? The last time I saw you you were on top of Mt. Carmel you were calling down fire from heaven. You had great faith. You had great confidence. Now, look at you, Elijah. What are you doing here?” I’m sure that stirred something in Elijah’s heart and he said, “Oh, God. You are right! I want to know you and I want to hear from you and I want to relate to you so God, reveal yourself to me!” BOOM! A great hurricane blew the rocks apart. “There you are, Lord. Where are you? I see you. You have to be in that wind somewhere.” but he didn’t find him. Then there was an earthquake an earth shaking experience “Surely God, you are in some big earth shaking experience!” but he wasn’t there. “Fire. I’ve had experience with fire” Elijah said. “Just not long ago, God was in the fire and you’re in the fire now again, aren’t you Lord?” but he wasn’t in the fire. “Where are you, Lord? Oohh.” The Psalmist says, “Be still and know that I am God.” God had talked through the wind before; God had talked through earthquakes before and we know God had talked through fire before. Sometimes when you get spiritually defeated, God says, “Don’t depend on the way I *used* to deal with you. Yesterday’s manna is no good. It’s rotten. The experience you had last year or ten years ago, thirty years ago that doesn’t count anymore. I want to have a new revelation of myself to you so listen up! I’m going to talk to you! And you’ll be surprised the way I do talk to you.”

Elijah was spiritually defeated, because I have found that in the Bible depression is the shadow that is cast on the other side of “mountaintop experiences” with God. Don’t you love those mountaintop experiences? Don’t you love when the wind blows and the earth shakes and the fire falls? Don’t you just love those experiences? But that’s not the normal that’s the *extraordinary*. When it doesn’t happen all the time and if you are depending on those kinds of things and looking for those kind of things, it leads to disappointment and depression.

There are many characters in the Bible who enter into the shadow of depression and discouragement after a great spiritual high. Remember Moses? In Exodus 15 after Moses took the rod of God and struck the Red Sea and the water stood up on either side and they walked through dry he turned around and here came the enemies of God he used the rod of God again and the enemies were drowned. That’s a great mountaintop experience! But just a few days later they are out in the desert without any water and everybody is complaining and griping against Moses. When they got to the other side of the Red Sea, they said, “Moses. Moses. He’s our hero!” A few days later they said, “Moses. He’s a zero!” They grumbled against Moses. The little bit of water they found was bitter. That’s why they call the place Marah. Moses could have said, “What in the world is going on? I thought after the Red Sea everything was going to be great. Let’s have another Red Sea experience!” There was not another Red Sea experience.

What about old Jonah? God said, “I want you to go down to Nineveh and preach,” and Jonah said, “I’m not going to do it!” He turned and went in the other direction. He was in a storm. They cast him overboard and a fish God had prepared swallowed him and finally, God got his attention. He said, “Okay, Lord. I’m going to do what you want me to do. He went into Nineveh and preached the word and do you know what happened? They had revival in that city! The Bible says that from the greatest to the least of them they repented in sackcloth and ashes. It was a great mountaintop experience, people falling down in repentance. “Oh, Jonah, You are right! We repent! God, we trust you!” Have you ever read the fourth chapter of the book of Jonah? Jonah’s was sitting under a gourd vine griping and complaining and said, “Oh, I just wish I hadn’t even been born!” How can that happen? It’s because sometimes depression is the shadow that is cast right after great mountaintop experiences. Here’s Elijah fresh from the fire falling on Carmel wondering where the fire is and God’s trying to speak in a whisper.

Are you looking for God in the wrong place? Are you filling your ears and your eyes with so much static God can’t break through? The wind and earthquakes and fire are captivating all your attention so God can’t speak to you. God says, “When you are depressed, it may be a problem—not just a physical problem, it might be a spiritual problem. If it is, listen up and I’ll speak to you in a different way than I’ve ever spoken to you.” So first of all it could be a physical problem and when you are physically drained, God says, “Get up, I’ll feed you.” When you are spiritually defeated, he says, “Listen up, I will speak to you.”

III. ELIJAH WAS EMOTIONALLY DEPLETED

Number three it might be an emotional problem and when you are emotionally depleted, God says, “Link up with other people, because I have others to help you.” One of Elijah’s biggest problems was he thought he was the only righteous one left.

1 Kings 19:14. “He replied, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.’”

Have you ever felt that way? “Everybody is out to get me! I’m the only one who is doing your will, God.” Look at what God said in verse 15.

1 Kings 19:15-21. “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. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him. So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. ‘Let me kiss my father and mother good-by,’ he said ‘and then I will come with you.’ ‘Go back,’ Elijah replied. ‘What have I done to you?’ So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing

equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.”

Do you see the problem with Elijah? Here he is under the Juniper tree saying, “God, I have had enough. I am so discouraged and depressed, just let me die. He was physically drained. He was spiritually defeated but he was also emotionally depleted. He was lonely. Did you know if you don’t have any people with whom you can link up for support and friendship and help, you’re going to be depressed?”

When I was going through the seminary in the mid 1970’s there was a teaching they were giving to seminary students that I think is terrible teaching. They were teaching that pastors need to be professionally separated from the congregation, that they need to be different from the congregation so they can be their pastor. It was sort of the teaching in seminary at that time, “Don’t make friends with the members in your church.” Could that be why in a recent survey in a leadership magazine seventy percent of American pastors said they don’t have any close friends? 70%. Could that be why according to a leadership magazine again every week in America 1,500 people are leaving the ministry? Because they are emotionally depleted! They don’t have any strength. They don’t have any network of friends to help them. God said, “Elijah, I know you are depressed because you think you are all alone. That’s not true. There’s Hazeel there’s Jehu and there’s Elisha. By the way there are seven thousand others and you need to link up with them!”

So if you are depressed, you need to look around and find brothers and sisters in Christ to reach out to you to give you help and to give you strength. You need a small group of friends with whom you can relate where you know their names. In Green Acres Baptist Church we call those things Sunday School classes. If you are not a part of a small group where you know everybody’s name in that group, you’re going to miss out on it and you are going to be a good candidate for depression! You also need a large group experience where you are brothers and sisters with people although you may not even know their names. You just know you are a part of a group that they are a part of. We call that Green Acres Baptist Church! If you don’t link up with people in a small group and link up with people in a congregational group, you become a candidate for depression. The Bible never says we are going to live life without depression. God just says when you go through periods of depression, don’t just lie there—get up! Don’t think there is no voice from God—listen up! And don’t think you are all alone—link up with others!

When upon life’s billows, you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged thinking all is lost,
So amid the conflict whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all!
Count your many blessings. Name them one by one
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

(“Count Your Blessings” by Johnson Oatman, Jr.)

CONCLUSION

A man came to me one time who was going through a great financial crisis. This man lost literally hundreds of thousands of dollars. He owed everybody. I asked him, “How in the world are you even surviving? How can you smile? How can you be enthusiastic about Jesus and about life when you are just going through all kinds of problems? He said, “Next time you come to my house, I will show you how.” It made me curious, so not long after I went to his house. He said, “I told you I would show you the thing that gives me strength.” We went into his den and there was a painting. It was a simple painting of a Bible experience we call “Daniel in the Lion’s Den.” It was a beautiful painting. There was Daniel standing there among ferocious looking lions. These were not sleeping, slumbering lions. These were lions whose teeth were bared and whose claws were exposed. You could tell that they were threatening to hurt Daniel! There was a shaft of light that seemed to be falling down from the roof of that cave in which Daniel and those lions were being kept. The man said to me, “Look at Daniel’s eyes!” I looked closely at the eyes of Daniel and Daniel was looking up at the light. The man said to me, “The thing that gives me strength in the midst of my troubles is this. Daniel is not looking at the lions. He is looking at the light!”

So when you get surrounded with a lot of adversity; when you get surrounded by a lot of problems, don’t focus on the lions focus on the light and that’s God’s prescription for depression.

OUTLINE

I. ELIJAH WAS PHYSICALLY EXHAUSTED

God's prescription:

1. Sleep
2. Eat
3. Exercise

II. ELIJAH WAS SPIRITUALLY DEFEATED

III. ELIJAH WAS EMOTIONALLY DEPLETED