



Elijah Series #7 “Thoughts on Feelings of Failure and Depression”

Introduction

We have been tracking Elijah’s faith journey from his first appearance before Ahab the evil, godless king of Israel and his Gentile wife Jezebel. He appears in Scripture boldly announcing God’s judgment on the nation for blatant Baal worship throughout the land. God’s national judgment would fall in the form of a 3 ½ year devastating drought. Jezebel had introduced and disseminated degenerate Baal worship and actually exterminated as many of the prophets of Yahweh she could find.

We knew nothing of Elijah up to this point. He appeared out of nowhere and God elevated him to the prominent prophet of his time.

We watched him stand up to Ahab and Jezebel.

We noticed his effective prayer life as it stopped the rain.

We observed him faithfully hearing and obeying God.

We marveled at his faith in God to protect and provide for him by the brook.

We noticed him obey God’s direction to take up residence in the middle of Jezebel’s hometown again trusting God for protection and provision.

We heard his effective prayer to supernaturally provided food for the widow.

We wondered God answering his prayer to raise the widow’s boy to life again.

We observed his continued boldness to stand up to and confront Ahab.

We noted an increase in Elijah’s boldness as he single-handedly stood up to a neutral crowd and 450 demonically-driven prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel.

We rejoiced at God’s spectacular answer to Elijah’s simple prayer for fire.

We witnessed the people’s grand shift out of neutral into a full embrace of Yahweh.

We read of Elijah’s gruesome execution of Baal’s prophets in keeping with the Law.

We saw God respond to the persistent prayer of Elijah for rain.

Finally, we watched Elijah outrun Ahab’s chariot to Jezreel because “God’s hand was on him.

It is important that you track with the amazing faith of this prophet of God. So far, we have not seen one lapse of faith along the way. At least the Holy Spirit chose not to record any. So far, it has been hard to identify with someone this effective in his faith walk. He lived by faith, prayer, hearing AND obeying God’s direction for his life. James is clear the Elijah was a man of “like passions” as we are. Were it not for this next glimpse into Elijah’s journey we would have trouble believing that. God has never been shy about telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth when it comes to human frailties. James early affirmed that, “We ALL stumble in MANY ways.”

We are about to witness a major meltdown from this monumental man.

- Powerful prophet to a whining wimp.
- Significant deliverer to a man sidelined by fear, despair and depression.
- A man who dared stand alone against a hostile crowd to a man who ran from the queen.
- A man with every reason to live to a man pleading to die.
- Victorious prayer for life giving rain from the top of the mountain to a prayer to die in the valley of despair.
- A man who waited for the word of the Lord running from the word of the queen.

He lost his connection with God’s direction.

He lost His courage in the face of opposition.

He lost his divine perspective on life.

He lost his will to carry on ministry for God.

He lost his will to live.

Up to this point, I have sought to examine the content of the passage and then extract the applicable universal principles from the passage. This message I am going to direct us to observe the content and then I want to share some thoughts on the subject of feelings of failure and depression. There plenty of extractable principles to discuss, but I will reserve that for time. There are lessons to be learned even in the face of failure. Feelings of depression and a sense of failure are not foreign to God's servants. Guilt and a sense of inadequacy at his initial attempt to deliver Israel from Egyptian tyranny hamstrung Moses.

King David exhibited a myriad of dark feelings all through the Psalms.

"Why are you cast down O my soul?"

Jeremiah pretty much gave up on God as he stood in the rubble of Jerusalem.

My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So I say, "My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the LORD." Lam 3

Paul suffered despair under negative circumstances.

For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life... 2 Cor. 1:8-11

VII. Lessons from Beersheba where Elijah learns to fix his hope completely on God.

A. Cause of Elijah's Lapse 19:1-5

1. External circumstances or environment

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 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." 1 Kings 19:1-2

Elijah just came down from massive revival. The sound of the people affirming their trust in Yahweh hung in the air. The dramatic answer to Elijah's prayer for rain was still falling from the sky. Circumstances were great. Victory was sweet. Maybe Elijah expected to carry the revival started on Carmel down to Jezreel and the overthrow of Ahab and the wicked Queen Jezebel. One problem loomed its ugly head. Wicked Queen Jezebel was incensed and sent a very specific and personal threat to Elijah. "You're gonna die in 24 hours!!!"

Usually it doesn't take a complete circumstantial disaster in all areas to derail us. Sometime it is a single isolated negative to shift our focus. Trying to avoid all negative circumstances sets you up for sure depression. We live in a broken world with innumerable consequences of brokenness and that won't change until Jesus comes. We must learn to address those negative aspects of life through faith in the God over all circumstances.

I know that depression is much more multifaceted than the observation I will extract here but I believe there is wisdom to be found to address the issues.

2. Self-focused fear rather than God-focused faith

Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba... 1 Kings 19:3

The text does not tell us why all of a sudden Elijah reacts in fear rather than faith. Up to this point he has not given it a second thought. He stood up to Ahab and Jezebel without fear but faith in God's provision and protection. He waited for God's direction before acting. Jezebel had people looking for Elijah and God protected him in her hometown.

As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. 1 Kings 18:10

No fear then. He stood up to Ahab again and 450 prophets of Baal. Not fear then either. Why now? For some reason Elijah lost connection to God's direction. He acted without God's direction. Sometimes our faith lapses may not have an immediately discernable cause; they just are.

3. Physical/emotional exhaustion

Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba... 1 Kings 19:3

It is important to note that Elijah had already extended enormous amounts of energy from the showdown on Mount Carmel to the foot race with Ahab to Jezreel.

Even Jesus recognized the need for R&R.

The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves. Mark 6:30-32

God's next direction might have been to an isolated place to "rest awhile." Instead Elijah took it on himself to rely on self-protection and RUN. Out of fear of Jezebel he ran to Beersheba. That would have been a 120 mile run taking three days or more. From there, he will trek a day deeper into the wilderness.

4. Isolation

...and he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree... 1 Kings 19:3-4

Elijah dismissed his servant and set out by himself. Perhaps he figured ministry was over and no longer had any need for him. In isolation we have no sounding board. We are left to our own imagination. We have no encouragement. We have no perception correctors or life encouragers. We are at the mercy of the enemy to paint whatever picture he wants to paint.

5. Self-destructive thoughts

and he requested for himself that he might die... 1 Kings 19:4

Helplessness and hopelessness leads to a loss of desire to continue on. He feels like he has no more purpose in ministry. He feels like God is finished with him so there is no reason to live any longer. Lord let me quit. It is too hard. Funny, not only didn't God answer that prayer then but probably not until the Great Tribulation.

6. Faulty perception

"It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." 1 Kings 19:4

The fact that Jezebel maintained here vehemence against Yahweh appeared as abject failure to Elijah. Elijah's lifelong purpose to eradicate Baalism no longer seemed possible. He couldn't bring people to Yahweh any better than his ancestors.

They failed one by one, and died, and entered the darkness; and I have failed likewise. To what end did Moses lead this people through the wilderness? Why did the Judges fight and deliver them? Of what use was the wise guidance of Samuel? What has come of David's harp, and Solomon's temple and magnificence? It ends, and my work ends, in the despotism of Jezebel, and a nation of apostates!

7. Escape

And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. 1 Kings 19:5

He didn't wait for an answer. He just fell asleep. Sleep it off. Check out.

B. Cure for Elijah's Depression 19:6-21

1. Regain physical / emotional health

And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." 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. 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." 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. 1 Kings 19:5-8

We should never overlook the physical factors related to depression. Exhaustion, chemical imbalance, devastating circumstances, lack of sleep, stressors. These need to be addressed and sometimes we need to submit to the help of others to provide the necessary resources. In Elijah's case, God sent an angel to minister to him. There is an indication that it might have actually been Jesus. (THE Angel of the LORD). Fresh baked bread and water. More rest. More bread and water.

2. Realization of our own inadequacy.

Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.

It is OK to acknowledge our inability to do something. We need to realize we need outside resources.

3. Restore connection with God

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. 1 Kings 19:8

We have no indication that God instructed Elijah to travel the 270 mile forty day and night journey to Sinai. Somehow Elijah had a desire to hear from God again and what better place than where Moses received a message and commission from God. The extended rest perhaps restored a desire to carry on but to do what? It is here that Elijah will again hear "the Word of the Lord." It had been momentarily eclipsed by his fear and lapse of faith. Sometimes it takes time to restore your connection with God. The use of forty in the Bible often indicates a period of testing or discipline. The children of Israel took 40 years to restore their faith. Moses spent 40 days connecting with Yahweh. Jesus suffered 40 days in temptation. Note that God provided the necessary resources to facilitate this journey back to faith.

4. Reset your perspective

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?" 1 Kings 19:9

God first led Elijah to take inventory. I think what He said was, "Elijah what are you doing here? I didn't direct you here." Elijah's response provides some insight into his spiritual/emotional condition.

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." 1 Kings 19:10

Oh, now he is concerned about his life. He had just asked God to kill him. His helplessness and hopelessness rises prominently to the surface. What am I doing here? I did what I could. It didn't do any good. There is nothing more I can do. I don't see a way. My spiritual aspirations are all shattered. God resets His faulty perceptions.

First, realize I am not out to get you.

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. 1 Kings 19:11-13

Moses got a burning bush not the rumbling and fire on the mountain. God communicated with Elijah in a gentle whisper. Too often we don't reconnect with God because we perceive Him as an angry vindictive God that is about to demolish us or reject us.

Second, evaluate your mission.

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?" 1 Kings 19:13
What am I doing here? Elijah parroted the same reasoning as before.

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." 1 Kings 19:14
I tried but I failed. I am alone without any resources. I see no way to go on.

5. Revisit your mission with a new perspective

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." 1 Kings 19:15-18

First, I never intended you to do this thing alone in the first place. It was not your mission, it is MINE and I was directing your part step by step.

Second, I have others lined up to continue my work. I have line up Hazael, Jehu and Elisha who will continue to carry out my judgment on the erring nation.

Third, you are not alone in your fervor for me. Contrary to your old perceptions, there are at least 7,000 who have not forsaken My covenant.

6. Receive an intimate partner

So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and ministered to him. 1 Kings 19:19-21

Elijah returned to his hear and obey pattern. The first thing he did was to find Elisha. Elijah was never alone again the rest of his earthly ministry. This was someone of God's designation. He didn't even instruct Elijah to go out and find him – just receive him. He directed Elijah to accept help. Stop being a lone ranger.

7. Return to ministry

After Elisha, next stop Damascus to anoint Hazael. This would be a 500 mile plus assignment. At first I thought that Elijah would never return to any significant ministry, the reality is he actually returned to boldly proclaiming the word of the Lord. He fearlessly continued to confront the evil of his day. Including a judgment on Ahab's house and a prediction of Jezebel's death. He effectively trained the one who would have twice the impact. He ministered, along with Moses, to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. If my sense is correct, he will in the future return as one of the most powerful and bold witnesses for Yahweh during the Great Tribulation ending in martyrdom.

For whatever reason you have checked out. God wants you back in the game. As long as we are alive, God has something for us to do. The specific application may change but not the fact. We may not always do the same thing but He wants us to be engaged. An effective ministry, persistent prayer life, fearless confrontation does not guarantee insulation from depression or feelings of failure. It didn't for Elijah or any other major Biblical figure.

What God used on Elijah are some of the same elements involved bringing us out of our dark holes.

FURTHER THOUGHT AND APPLICATION

Application of this message involves probing the seven elements God used to spur Elijah back into ministry. If you are struggling with feelings of failure and depression it may have any number of causes but I urge you to at least consider the following in your journey to healthy perspective.

Consider, it is not just one of the elements or some mysterious sequence of application but the combination of these elements that should be considered.

If your struggle is circumstance related, remember that we have little or no control over people or circumstances around us. Embracing a biblical perspective of life in a broken world is essential. The think we can't do is spend all our emotional energy trying to eliminate or change. Sometimes we may be able to do something. Most of the time it has to do with our perspective and our response.

He enabled Elijah to regain his physical health.

Have you explored any possible physical/medical sources of your state of being? It could be anything from physical exhaustion to stress to chemical imbalance. Regular exercise and good nutrition contributes to mental health. Don't ignore any physical components. Never try to deal with life problems when you are physically and emotionally exhausted. Heed Jesus' council. "Come away and rest a while."

He helped Elijah realize his personal fallibility.

Have you put higher expectations on yourself than warranted? Are you taking responsibility for things that God never intended? Deal with your "superman/woman" complex. We ALL have limitations and non-strengths. Those with perfectionist tendencies must come to grips with the reality that there was only ONE perfect person that ever walked this earth and you are NOT Him.

God actually prefers using the weak things of this world to accomplish His purposes.

God allows us to come to the end of our resources so we will center our confidence in His.

For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; 2 Cor 1:8-9

Sometimes "the journey is too much for you." Without divine preparation and resources, you will not be able to succeed. We observed an earlier principle, if God commands it, God enables it.

He directed Elijah to restore His connection and communication with Him.

I think this is a most key element. Elijah allowed fear of Jezebel to diminish his faith in God. Up to this point his daily interaction with God enabled him to rise above any and all threats to his life or ministry. The reason he responded in fear instead of faith is not revealed. It seems the only difference from other times in his life was the physical/emotional exhaustion.

Sometimes we are most vulnerable to doubt and fear when we are physically sick or weak. The physical is so connected to the spiritual. You will be even more vulnerable if you have a weak connection in the first place.

Good communication and connection has to do with a continual exposure and interaction to the will and ways of God.

That exposure comes from interaction with God's word.

The ultimate purpose God inspired His word is to equip us for effective ministry.

*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable
for teaching,*

*for reproof,
for correction,
for training in righteousness;
so that (ultimate objective)
the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
2 Timothy 3:16-17*

*And do not be conformed to this world, (wrong thinking)
but be transformed by the renewing of your thinking, (though interaction with Scripture)
so that
you may prove what the will of God is,
that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
Romans 12:2*

Such interaction with Scripture will serve as preventive as well as curative in regard to spiritual health.

He reset Elijah's perception regarding life and ministry.

God is not out to get you. He called and gifted you for a reason. He is on your side. He longs for relationship with you and effectiveness in His service.

How would you answer God's questions to Elijah? What are you doing HERE? Consider where you are. Are you sure this is where God called you to be and what God called you to do? It is healthy to take the time to evaluate before God from time to time. Are you sure your feelings of failure have to do with failing what God called you to do or what you FELT God wants you to do? Are you where you are because God asked you or someone else guilted you?

He encouraged Elijah to revisit what it is God wanted him to be doing.

It is time to revisit where you are. It is time to open your heart to wherever and whatever GOD wants you to be doing. Service to God is for a life time. There is NO retirement for the servant of God. There may be a change of direction or job description but NEVER a change in purpose. He has placed EVERY Christian in the body for the good of the body and the glory of God. Negative results always occur whenever body parts cease effective function.

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Eph 4:15-16

The church grows best when all the parts are working properly. Just because the heart is old does not mean its function is dispensable.

What is God prompting you to be doing?

The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree, He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green, to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. Psalm 92:12-15

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and (continually) bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My Name He may give to you. John 15:16

He designated a life ministry partner for Elijah to receive.

IN regard to pastoral ministry, the statistics regarding intimate friends is dismal. It is estimated that up to 70% of pastors claim they have no intimate friends.

In spite of a proliferation of Facebook “Friends” fewer and fewer people actually nurture an intimate friendship in spite of irrefutable statistics concerning the overall value of intimate friendship. One statistics equate intimate friendship benefits equal to not smoking or drinking.

In Elijah’s case, he didn’t have to go out and look for someone to engage in ministry with him. God assigned one. Maybe God wants you to look for one but may also have the one you need (not necessarily want) waiting for you to open your heart to the possibility. At least be open to praying about it.

He returned Elijah to ministry.

If you are already engaged in service to the kingdom, great. If not, get back in the game.