

Behind the Mask

Depression

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Week 3

1 Kings 19:1-13

Welcome to week three of our series, “Behind the Mask”. We’re dealing with some pretty sensitive issues that we don’t like to talk about, and we don’t like to bring out in the open. We’re talking about what’s going on behind the mask. The part of our lives we don’t like to deal with, or we don’t know how to deal with: mental health: anxiety, worry, stress, depression, self-harm, suicide.

In week 1, we talked about the four root causes to mental health challenges: **Situational, Biological, Clinical and Spiritual**. And these root causes are very evident when it comes to Depression. For some, there is occasional depression. “I feel depressed.” For others, there is ongoing depression: “I AM depressed.” As a matter of fact, more adults than ever are suffering with depression in some form. As a result, antidepressants have become our second highest volume drug.

1. What has depression looked like in your life?

Depression is not a sin. A number of Bible characters struggled through depression. A man named Job struggled with deep depression, which is completely understandable with his life circumstances. A prophet named Jeremiah wrote an entire book called Lamentations. He earned the name “weeping prophet.” David struggled most of his life with extreme anguish and being downcast. In places he writes about it being a daily thing. So, if you struggle with depression, you are in good company.

Depression is not a sin, but it is a sign. It is a signal that something else is going on. It is a warning light on the dashboard telling you something needs attention. The problem is, you never know how important it is until you stop and get it checked out. Here’s what depression can be for us: Depression can be a warning sign to help us look under the hood and find out what is really going on.

2. When you have had moments of depression, did you ask yourself, “why am I feeling this way?” What can make depression worse is when you feel down and you don’t know why. If the answer is not obvious, where does your mind tend to go next?

To help in finding answers to what is going on “under the hood,” we are going to the Old Testament book of 1 Kings, where we read the story of a character named Elijah. Elijah is one of the greatest prophets in the history of Israel. And he appears at a time when nineteen consecutive kings have led the nation away from God. And now the current King, Ahab is the worst of them all. He angered God more than any of them. And he married a woman named Jezebel who was more evil than he was.

Together they introduced the false god called Baal and began executing God's prophets. So, God sends Elijah to confront Ahab saying that there's not going to be any rain for a few years. Fast-forward 3 years and they're going to meet up again on the top of a mountain where Elijah challenges 850 false prophets to a duel—1 Kings 18. Elijah wins the dual—or rather, God does—in dramatic fashion, but rather than relishing this moment of victory, we read this, starting in 1 Kings 19:1.

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, ESV)

Elijah wins and Ahab loses and he goes home and whines to his wife. And scary Jezebel threatens Elijah, "You have 24 hours and you're a dead man." In his greatest moment and celebration, someone he doesn't even like makes a negative comment...And Elijah became afraid and immediately ran for his life. *Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. (1 Kings 19:3, ESV)*

Elijah is afraid and he runs to safety. He runs a little more. He runs out of gas--relationally, emotionally, mentally, physically, spiritually depleted.

3. Have you experienced something similar to Elijah? When have you had a really high moment in your life that led to a really low feeling?

Elijah, our prophet, is battling depression. Afraid. Overwhelmed. Alone. Stressed. Burnout. Exhausted, Even worse he's suicidal. *"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." (1 Kings 19:4, ESV)*

Maybe he just wants to check out of the life he currently has. And he doesn't see any other way to fix things except to end things.

When you find yourself dealing with depression, it is good to SAY how you feel. When Elijah stops running, before he passes out, he speaks three clear words to God: "It is enough." It takes a lot of courage and awareness to say how you feel. When you realize that something is not right. When you feel like you've lost the motivation. When you're tired and exhausted and burned out and maybe overwhelmed. When you have thoughts that you're not sure you want your life to go on...Don't deny it. Don't keep it to yourself. You need to say, to someone you trust or a professional, how you feel.

Elijah can't ignore things anymore without effect. He's Tired. Hungry. Exhausted. So, he passes out.

"And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. 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." (1 Kings 19:5-6, ESV)

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 19:7-8, ESV)

Notice, the angels aren't dropping in Bible verses and telling him he's not spiritual enough but encourages him to eat. Worse than depression is depression combined with being hungry and dehydration.

There (Horeb) 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, ESV)

When you find yourself dealing with depression, it is good to SAY how you feel... and THINK why you're here.

Now, geographically Elijah has traveled from the far north to the far south completely out of the jurisdiction of queen Jezebel. And then he went a little bit further. Mentally and physically, he's had enough and is ready to quit and he wants to die. And God asks him, "what are you doing here?" But perhaps God wasn't looking for a geographical answer but was telling Elijah to stop for a moment and ask, "why am I here, feeling this way?"

4. What do you need to think to yourself... "Why am I angry now? Why I am afraid now? Why am I stressed about this?"

As human beings, who are wonderful creations of God, we have a brain with an emotional center. A medial prefrontal cortex that allows us to stop and ask why we're feeling this way and when you engage that part of your brain and emotion, the rest of your brain has an amazing way of calming down. "What might be at the root of how I'm feeling?" I don't know... I just feel off. OR maybe I should see a doctor.

It might take someone else to guide you through this. Have you heard the HALT acronym?

- H - hungry
- A - angry
- L - lonely
- T - tired

So, after a snack and two naps, Elijah takes this 40 day walk and he ends up on a mountain range that many scholars agree is the same mountain where Moses received the 10 Commandments. The place where God spoke to Moses in a burning bush. So, this mountain has history as a place where God has spoken before. And God wants to speak to Elijah. Elijah is still alone and a little angry. He says vs 10...

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, ESV)

But notice how God responds. He's not dismayed. He doesn't scold Elijah for his anger and displeasure.

And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the

earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:11-13, ESV)

Instead of a loud and demonstrative showing, notice that When Elijah is at his lowest, God speaks the softest. The DEVIL by the way, shouts lies. The lies that leave us overwhelmed like, "You're not good enough. You're not important enough. You don't matter. It'll always be this way. "But God whispers truth. When you and I are experiencing depression, not only do we need to SAY how you feel and THINK why you're here. We also need to...**HEAR the voice of God.**

God may speak to you in a moment of prayer. He may speak during worship or in His Word. He sometimes speaks through a friend. But He's more than capable to drop that whisper into your heart, your mind, your ear, and a time of peace and quiet.

5. Where is a place you can go to feel God's presence and hear his voice? Is it in a room? Is it worshipping alone? Do you have a Bible in one hand and a coffee cup in the other? Is it with friends? Serving others?

God speaks to Elijah in a whisper. It's hard for us to hear whispers from God when we're exhausted...with noise in our lives and competing voices. The voice of Jesus is the voice that calls you. He loves you. He died for you. He is with you in your darkest valley, and in the times when you feel utterly abandoned.

When Jesus died on the cross, Matthew records that darkness covered all the land (Mt. 27:45). Jesus understands darkness. But even though you may be in darkness right now—or you've been there before—darkness is not the end of the story. For God delivers us from the domain of darkness (Col. 1:13), and now He calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pe. 2:9).

If you struggle with darkness and depression, you're not alone. God knows. And He is WITH you!

Next Steps Resources: e91church.com/mask