

“Mountains, Valleys, & Caves: Elijah in the Cave of Horeb”

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1 Kings 19:9-18

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“Everyone has feet of clay.” The saying is an idiom. We don’t take the saying literally, but it means everyone has weaknesses. The “feet of clay” idiom comes from a dream of the king of the world at the time, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, in Daniel 2:32-33: “*The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.*” That king’s “feet of clay” were exposed by his pride which resulted in foolish and ungodly decisions that finally led to a mental illness in Daniel 4.

We’ve seen “feet of clay” in our Old Testament study as the three greatest figures of the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses, and David all had problems. Elijah, after one of the most spectacular victories in the Bible, folds like a cheap tent when threatened by the wicked Queen Cruella de Vil (a.k.a. Jezebel). After the victory on Mount Carmel, it seems inconceivable that this abrupt reversal could happen. He was on top of the mountain and fell into the valley of despair. Part of Elijah’s problem is identified in 1 Kings 17:3—because he was alone. The verse concludes with “...and he left his servant there.” He had nobody to help him. In contrast, Paul recognized his need for others while he was imprisoned. Elijah didn’t write Psalm 88, but it sounds like he could have. We can all end up as “cave” men or women in the pit of despair. Sometimes our depression is genetic—we come from families prone to it. Often our problem is circumstantial, and depression is a realistic conclusion that things can end in a bad place. Like walking through the valley of the shadow of death, we just don’t want to get stuck here. Wilderness, valleys, and caves are part of life. Read all of 1 Kings 19, but also read chapter 21. Elijah recovers. In 2 Kings 1-2, his successor, Elisha, is named. He embodies hope.

APP: Our theme this week is about dwelling in cave of **depression**. How are U doing with this topic? How are U seeking help? Don’t go it alone—others can and want to help. We need to be reminded that depression is normal and sometimes, appropriate. We don’t just skip through times of significant loss. We can use our weakness to depend on the Lord. Furthermore, our wounds make us sensitive to help others who stand in need. Who do you need to reach out to for help? Who are you helping?

Background: James 5:17: ***Elijah was a man just like us.*** Elijah had huge **mountain top** experiences, but the one from 1 Kings 18 was his highest geographically and spiritually. The “Super Bowl of the OT” was when he asked the Israelites how long they would go on limping between two opinions – follow God or Baal. The OT Super Bowl final score = Elijah: 850 – Baal prophets: 0. ***Elijah was a man just like us.*** I don’t know anyone who’s had THESE types of experiences, but we have all had wonderful moments and events in our lives. Elijah also had some Valleys & Caves.

1 KINGS 19:1-8. Elijah was preparing a Super Bowl victory party when Queen Jezebel sent a nasty note saying she’d kill him like he’d killed her prophets. (Why didn’t she just do it? Why did she send a note?) Instead of acting with confidence, Elijah collapsed in terror from the enemy he’d just defeated. He went from fight to flight & from Mt Carmel through the Jezreel/Jordan Valleys to a Cave. He wasn’t a failure, but he felt like one.

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Elijah was a man just like us. We can quickly go from a Mountain to a Valley/Cave with a phone call, a Social Media post, a conversation, or a letter. Depression may be the APPROPRIATE response to loss. It makes sense when we lose a loved one, our job, a friend or pet, or the doctor tells us our prognosis isn’t good. Change is great if it in our favor, but not when we lose something valuable. If Elijah can end up in a cave, anybody can end up there.

How did Elijah end up in a cave?

Emotionally depleted. Great victories can sap our strength. We cannot live on a mountaintop forever. What goes up, must come down. Elijah tanked emotionally. He was afraid (v3); exhausted (v4); he compared himself to others & had low self-esteem (v4); was angry with God for his problems (v10); was alone (v10); and was worried because his enemies were trying to kill him (v10). Just one of these can cause depression, but Elijah was a depression magnet.

Physically exhausted. We can depress simply if we don’t eat right, exercise, or get enough sleep. The angel told him to eat, drink, and sleep. Twice. Physical health is crucial. Chemical imbalances need treatment.

Alone. He dismissed his servant & was alone. The Lone Ranger needed Tonto. Batman needs Robin. Jesus was the true Super-Hero and in His darkest night, Maundy Thursday, He hosted a dinner for His friends. Then He went to Gethsemane. He didn’t isolate. He didn’t want to be alone. Better Together. We must have community. The first “not good” in the Bible is “to be alone.”

Forgot the Lord. God had done miracles for him. But when emotionally depleted & physically exhausted, we can shift our focus from the Lord to our problems, too. She intimidated him. We can very quickly collapse like this too. Bullying not only happens on the playground, but social media & phones can make it far worse. At least on the playground we can run, hide, or go home, but it is much harder to turn off social media. It spreads like a wildfire. Sometimes it is not what others say something on social media about us, but we feel jealous when we compare ourselves with them.

He was stuck in a cave. The Lord spoke to him in a novel way. The Lord sent a tornado, an earthquake, and a fire, but it was in a gentle whisper that helped him out of his cave. A still small voice can be good enough. “Big” can be overrated. Small can be effective. We all prefer quick fixes, but they often don’t work long-term. We don’t need to feel we get well all at once. Could today be the day we hear the small whisper – “Let’s begin to get well. Let’s start today during Communion. Let’s come out of our cave.” Give it time...don’t make big promises. Let’s just take a step.

5 things that could help.

REMEMBER caves are part of life, too. Everyone, including the very best and brightest among us, has them. Remember our parents may have passed on genetics that make us prone to depression. Remember our identity in Christ. We are people of sacred worth. When we come to communion, remember Jesus. “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” Remember our true identity is not based on our performance. We don’t have to be perfect. Instead, receive the grace of Jesus today. We are loved, accepted, and forgiven in Jesus’ name. Claim our true identity. Do not forget the Lord.

OTHERS. Find Community: Isolation makes us forget and is not our friend. There were actually 7,000 others on the Lord’s team. Elijah forgot that. So many people struggle with anxiety and depression – now more than ever. We are truly Better Together. Look in your bulletin for Life Care Ministry. Asbury has all kinds of support. Reach out. Talk to someone.

Have a **PURPOSE.** Elijah got back on mission when the Lord told him he had work to do. That’s what the angels told the disciples at the Ascension. We all need something meaningful to do – a way to contribute. Asbury’s mission is Helping Others Follow Jesus. What could you do to assist someone? People need safe places when we struggle. This is a major way to find meaning and healing, too. We all need mentors, but we all need to mentor someone else. An invitation to help others who are in their cave. It may take a long time. We love quick fixes, but some may never come out. Who could you encourage, listen to, support, and offer a new perspective to?

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Express GRATITUDE. Elijah sunk into complaint. He felt things fell apart and didn’t know why. It’s easy to stop giving thanks and step into complaint. One of the best antidotes is to have a self-talk of gratitude, not complaint.

Daniel Ritchie is a Christian communicator. He wrote this: *I was born without arms. That is the best way to summarize my story. I stepped into suffering at birth. My physical body is a billboard for my pain. This has brought mocking, cruel jokes, stares, and the constant feeling that I am not like anyone else that I meet. I’ve never been able to hide. Many people can bury their pain, but my heartache is written all over my two empty sleeves. Those sleeves tell a story without my mouth ever saying a word. My pain almost swallowed me. But Christ showed me how much greater he was than my empty sleeves. I used to think that being born without arms was the most horrible thing that could happen to a person. In Christ, he has helped me say that the worst and most painful thing that has ever happened to me is also the best thing that has ever happened to me. I am thankful for my pain. All of the frustration that has come with it has reaped a bounty that I never could have produced on my own. God stepped in and carried me along in my weakness, letting me taste his strength, grace, and love in new ways. In my pain, he has magnified so many of his attributes.*

Have **HOPE.** Elijah lost his hope. We depress when we are unable to construct a future. We must have hope.

Elijah was just like us. He went through Mountains/Valleys/Caves. One advantage we have over him is we have Jesus. Our hope is in Jesus Christ. Stay calm, connected, course, stay in Christ. Romans 8:37-39 *In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*