

HOPE

1 KINGS 19:9-18

(Prepared by Gene Thompson)

1. What would you include in a list of five reasons a person might suddenly quit a job? (Stress; overlooked for promotion; Supervisor never pleased; No satisfaction in job; don't like the job; co-workers not pulling their load.)

In last week's study, Elijah trusted God in a big way in a showdown with the false prophets of Baal, with all of Israel watching. In today's study, we find Elijah in a very different place.

(Either read or have someone summarize 1 Kings 19:1-8.)

2. What do these verses indicate Elijah needed? (Rest and nourishment.)
3. When is despair or depression most likely to blindside us? (When we have experienced a spiritual victory and we let our guard down.)

This incredible man of God was afraid and ran for his life. Even though he was among the mightiest of all God's men, Elijah was given to spiritual depression. He was living proof of the fallacy that only those who know failure get depressed. Elijah is now hiding in a cave, fearful and discouraged when God comes to him.

ALONE? Read 1 Kings 19:9-10

1. Why did God ask Elijah this question? (He wanted Elijah to examine his own motives and reasons for feeling as he did.)

This same man who faced down the false prophets and watched fire fall from heaven quickly forgot God's responsiveness, faithfulness, and power and fled from a wicked woman.

When you combine this kind of forgetfulness, fear, and fatigue it is easy to see why Elijah was depressed.

2. What factors might contribute to people feeling alone, even when they are doing God's work? (When your focus is on self. When your enemies seem to be winning. When it is difficult to see what others are doing on your side.)
3. How does discouragement contribute to feelings of isolation? (We tend to withdraw and think we are the only person who cares and is doing what is right.)

When we allow our despair and depression to take over, we, like Elijah can lose the will to live.

4. What factors might contribute to a person feeling alone even when doing the right thing? (Fatigue—we need to get proper rest, even when we are working hard for the Kingdom.)
5. What should a person do if he or she is alone? (Talk to God immediately and be honest about your feelings. He is ready and waiting for us to come to Him with our needs.)

Elijah had gone from victor to victim, from winner to whiner, and from faith to fear. He felt like a failure. Hiding in a cave, Elijah was isolated and weary. He felt spiritually vulnerable. Yet God had not abandoned him. (Some scholars think this cave may have been the same one on Mt. Horeb Moses was in when God passed by—Ex. 33:22.)

THE WHISPER! Read 1 Kings 19:11-14

1. What would you think if God had told you to go stand at the cave's entrance, then a great, mighty wind blew, then an earthquake and then a fire? (I might think God was speaking to me through these mighty acts of nature.)

God sent a wind, earthquake, and fire to announce His arrival, but He was present in a soft whisper.

2. How does God speak to us most of the time? (Quietly in our heart.)

God often appears in life's still moments. Our world runs at such a fast pace that it often is difficult to hear God's voice. It seems there is always something to distract us from our time with God.

3. What sometimes makes a whisper more effective than a loud wind or jarring earthquake? (We generally pay closer attention so we can hear exactly what is being communicated.)
When Elijah “wrapped his face in his mantle” it was a demonstration of humility and reverence before God! He also knew that no one could see the Lord and live—Ex. 33:20.
4. What does God repeating His questions and Elijah providing the same response as in verse 10 tell us about Elijah’s state of mind? (It had not changed; he gave the same response.)
5. What situations might cause someone to feel the same way today? (A Sunday School teacher, who prays for the class faithfully, prepares intensely each week and yet very little response from the class.)
6. When have you seen God appear in big and small moments in your life? (Have members share experiences.)

God often speaks most clearly in stillness.

Sometimes our lives feel very loud, with many distractions clamoring for our attention. Maybe we need to tune our hearts to listen better for God’s whispers in our lives.

Many times, what we really need to pull us out of depression is a purpose, a mission to be accomplished.

REALITY DEFINED! Read 1 Kings 19:15-18

To my surprise, God did not correct Elijah for being afraid or feeling such a heavy load of despair. What God did do was give Him something to do that had purpose behind it.

1. How can being reminded that God has a work for us to do serve as a motivator that can help lift us out of despair? (Everyone needs a purpose, a reason to get out of bed each day. We all need meaningful missions for God.)
2. What in verse 18 gave Elijah encouragement? (He is not alone, there are yet 7,000 Israelites who have not bowed to Baal.)
3. How did knowing about God having a people who would stand beside him encourage Elijah for the work yet ahead? (Co-workers for the Kingdom always bring encouragement. We can accomplish much more together than individually. We can encourage and pray for each other.)
4. How had Elijah missed these 7,000 faithful Israelites? (His focus was on himself at this time, and they may have been in hiding also.)

After God gave Elijah instructions he moved promptly to obey, finding Elisha, and naming him as his successor. King Ahab’s reign was coming to an end. Refocused on God’s purposes for his life, Elijah found new hope and strength.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE!

One lesson of the Christian life is that we seldom learn our spiritual lessons on mountaintops. Those lessons are most frequently learned in the valley experiences of life when God comes to us and asks, “What are you doing here?”

1. What are some effective ways believers can bring hope to those in despair? (Faithful followers need other faithful followers to walk them from despair back to hope.)
2. Who do you know who may be in despair today that you can come along beside them and be an encourager?

“The last time we see Elijah in the Bible, he was on another mountaintop, specifically the Mount of Transfiguration with Christ. No longer running from the Jezebels of the world, Elijah had learned his lesson. He didn’t find God in the “strong wind...an earthquake...or the fire,” but in what Elijah called that “still small voice”—vv. 11-12. And that “still small voice” just might be whispering in your heart right now, “What are you doing here?”” O. S. Hawkins.

Don’t get depressed for lack of a mission from God—spread the gospel!