

# Elijah and Mental Health

## Intro

Hi, my name is Aaron, and today I want to talk about mental health, and specifically, I want to talk about what we can learn from the story of Elijah and his mental health battle that we find in the book of 1 Kings. You know, all of us have probably had times of joy and happiness in our lives. But most of us also, some more than others, have also struggled with times with depression or maybe anxiety.

And sometimes when someone is struggling with depression or anxiety or some other mental health issue, we might be tempted to think that maybe that person just doesn't have enough faith. But the truth is, is that even some of God's most famous prophets suffered from anxiety and depression at times. You know, today I want to talk briefly about the great prophet Elijah and what he experienced at times, a battle with his mental health.

You know, if you look in your Bibles, in 1 Kings 17, we're introduced to Elijah, and he's sent to King Ahab, who's the king of Israel, to tell him that there's going to be a drought. And Elijah is instructed to flee to a creek, and at this creek he's going to be fed by ravens with bread and meat, and he's going to drink water from the stream until the stream dries up. And we see in 1 Kings 17 that Elijah exhibits great faith in his obedience to God.

Then he goes to live in a place called Zarephath with a widow and her son, and he sees God work this amazing miracle of never-ending flour and oil for this woman until the very end of the famine. And her son even dies, and Elijah revives the boy. And so once again, this great prophet Elijah, another time, exhibits great faith in his God.

Then you move to 1 Kings 18, and you find that it's in the third year of the famine, and God tells Elijah to go meet the king of Israel, Ahab, and that God is going to send rain on the earth. And so God makes Elijah this promise. Well, Elijah tells Ahab to gather the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who dine at Ahab's wife Jezebel's table.

And Elijah builds an altar. He puts wood and the bull on the altar with 12 stones. And you know the story. He digs a trench around the altar. He then has four water pots filled and pours it on the sacrifice a second and a third time. And then he finally calls on God, and God sends fire from heaven. And the fire consumed the bull, the wood, the stones, even the dust and the water in the trench. Essentially, God vaporized it all. Notice again and again, Elijah is exhibiting great faith in his obedience to God and the promises that God makes to him.

Elijah believes them over and over and acts on them. In 1 Kings 18 and verse 40, Elijah then seizes the prophets of Baal, and they executed them there.

You know, then Elijah informs Ahab that the drought is over and that God is going to bring rain. God made him this promise, and Elijah believes the promise. And then there's a fascinating passage to me because it says that Elijah tells his servant, when he prays and he says, go look, and the servant goes and looks and doesn't see anything. And Elijah continues to pray and tell his servant to go two, three, four, five, six, seven times.

And finally, on the seventh time, his servant sees a cloud. Imagine having faith in God's promise to pray seven times and send your servant back seven times, each time believing and knowing that God's going to answer. He's going to keep his word that he promised. And finally, the sky becomes black and there was heavy rain.

You know, Elijah has mountaintop moments, literally and figuratively, in his ministry. But he has these great moments of faith over and over and over. And this is just in a few chapters.

You know, he proclaimed a drought for three years. He was fed by ravens. He saw the miracle of this never-empty pot of oil and flour. He raised a boy from the dead. In fact, I believe this is the first record in human history in the scriptures of someone actually being brought back from the dead. And Elijah was the one to do it. Elijah defeated 450 prophets of Baal. He witnessed God vaporize an altar.

But you know what? Despite all those mountaintop moments where Elijah exhibited great amounts of faith, I mean, how many people would say that Elijah was a superhuman? Believe it or not, Elijah was not always on a mountaintop. You know, right after 1 Kings 18 and 1 Kings 19, Jezebel sends a message to Elijah and she's threatening his life and

he flees to the wilderness alone. And after all of those mountaintop moments, guess what? Elijah was quickly in a valley.

And you say, "That's not possible. Elijah was a superhuman prophet, right? He wasn't like us. But the New Testament actually tells us in the book of James 5:17, it says that Elijah wasn't superhuman. It says James 5:17, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. And he prayed earnestly that it would not rain. And it didn't rain on the land for three years and six months."

You know, Elijah was not superhuman. He was a man with a nature just like ours. He prayed and believed that God would answer his prayer and God did.

And yet soon after all these mountaintop moments, he is struggling with fear, with anxiety, depression, and isolation. He's got fear for his life in 1 Kings 19:2. And you know what? Even though he was a great prophet, that didn't mean that he didn't struggle with fear, depression, and anxiety. We may have fear in our lives.

Maybe it's fear for something much less than our life, but look, fear is fear. We may be suffering with fear of failure, fear of disappointing others, maybe even fear of interacting with others.

How does God respond when Elijah is struggling? And can we learn anything from that to apply it to our own lives in our own situations today?

You know, notice God doesn't berate Elijah. He doesn't tell Elijah to just push through it or to pull himself up by his own bootstraps. God doesn't seem that Elijah is doing something wrong or needs to be punished whenever he's struggling with this fear and anxiety.

In fact, what happens in 1 Kings is that Elijah has an angel sent from God to him, and the angel tells him a few things. He tells him to eat. He tells him to lie down and get some rest. And then he tells him to get up and eat again.

You know, I read a medical study once, and this is just an excerpt from it. It said, a new study finds that people who maintain a broad range of healthy habits, from good sleep to physical activity to strong social connections, are significantly less likely to experience episodes of depression. So listing the healthy habits in order, (rest,) good sleep

habits, rest, (eat)good nutrition, food, and then (active)exercise or work and (social)social connections.

And it's interesting that what that article said, that study on mental health, is exactly what God does for Elijah. In 1 Kings 19:5-, it says, "Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, Arise and eat. Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals and a jar of water.

So he ate and drank, and then he did what? He laid down again. He got more rest. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you. So he arose and ate and drank. And then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God."

And so what did that study prescribe? Rest, food, activity, social connection.

What did God, through the angel, what did he prescribe for Elijah? Eat, sleep, eat, sleep, and then get back to work. You know, God gave him physical work. He told him to go and anoint Hazael as king over Syria. He told him to anoint Jehu as king over Israel and anoint Elisha as a prophet in your place. And Elisha begins to follow Elijah.

Look, if you're struggling with mental health, whether it's depression or anxiety or isolation or whatever it is, you may need to see someone about it professionally.

But the first thing that you might try, and this is the first thing I try whenever I'm feeling anxious or stressed or depressed, I try to get some sleep. I try to get some good nutrition, try to eat something healthy, and I try to get some exercise. And then the best thing that you can do is try to strengthen your social connections with those who can help you.

And I would recommend that the best place you can do that is at your local church of Christ. So listen, if you're struggling with mental health or anxiety or depression, there's not something wrong with you. The great prophet Elijah, after exhibiting great amounts of faith and trust in God, he at times came off the mountaintop and was in the valley.

And so what he did, what God prescribed to him, and God is the great physician, is to get some rest, to eat something, and then to get back to work or to exercise and strengthen your social connections.

I hope that if you're struggling with mental health, you'll try those things, and you may need to see someone about it professionally as well if those things don't help. Thanks for your time.

Remember that we can learn from Elijah, and the prophets were not superhuman. They were just like us, but they had great faith and trust in God. Hope you have a great day.