

1 Kings 19-20 - Dealing with Depression

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1 Kings chapter 19. I have to tell you that one of the things I love about the Bible is that it never attempts to paint a picture of the characters of the Bible in a way that is beyond what you and I can relate to. If they were all super men and super women, you and I would probably consider them, for the most part, untouchable and unreachable.

But, as we get into this passage this week here in 1 Kings, we're going to find out that Elijah, who's probably known, maybe one of the best-known prophets in the Bible and has one of the most powerful victories in the Bible, really crashes in this chapter. And I mean crashes big time. And his crash has some very specific reasons for happening and we'll look at those here hopefully tonight and so forth.

But I really like the idea that God doesn't withhold from you and I the humanity of the people whom He calls to minister. And it reminds you and I that He calls people just like you and I. And if you ever read through the Bible and get this impression like, wow, those people in the Bible, I could never do that, I wonder sometimes if you've really read the Bible. Because you can't read the Word of God very long before you run into these kind of people.

People like Elijah in the Old Testament, Peter in the New Testament. People who failed miserably or at least experienced failures in their lives, but yet who were used powerfully by God. King David. Wasn't that long ago you guys, we dealt with all the issues that king David went through, and we talked, how many times did we bring up the fact that his failures were many? And yet God used him powerfully, and we have to be careful, don't we?

Although we look at people who are in positions of leadership and we hold them accountable, we need to be careful not to hold them to a standard that is hypocritical, meaning something that we ourselves couldn't live up to. As we've said many times in the past, when you hear of someone who has a failure, the worst thing you and I can say is, how could they? The best thing we can say is, I know how they could, and because that's the fact of the matter.

1 Kings chapter 19, Elijah has just had the most incredible victory that we dealt with last week when all of the prophets of Baal were put to death following the Lord's most amazing demonstration of His power and glory.

Boy, you'd think that Elijah would be absolutely on top of the world, but it says in verse 1 of chapter 19 that, "*Ahab (and he's the king of Israel. He went home and) told (his wife) Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.*" (ESV)

These are the prophets of Baal, and Baal, remember, is a pagan god whom Jezebel worshiped. She was Phoenician in her background and she was a huge proponent, cheerleader of Baal worship there in Israel.

And so, Ahab comes home, and he says, hey, honey, you're not going to believe what happened today. What? Well, Elijah showed up and he challenged us on Mount Carmel, and all of your prophets. He challenged them to sacrifice a bull on an altar, but don't set fire to it and pray. And whoever prays, and their god sends fire to consume the sacrifice, that god is God. And so, your prophets took the challenge. And so guess what? Your prophets lost. Their god didn't respond. Baal didn't respond. But the Lord God, YAHWEH, responded. And so, Elijah took all of your prophets down to a valley and he slaughtered them there. All 450.

And we're told here that Jezebel had a very interesting response. Look at verse 2. "*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."*" Very, very poetic, almost verbose sort of a thing, a way of saying tomorrow by this time you'll be as dead as they are.

And you think Elijah, this is the prophet, Elijah. He just got done conquering and winning the hearts, at least however long, of the people in such a way as to just create this great victory or the Lord created it. And all these prophets are now dead. And God has shown Himself powerful and faithful.

And you would think that Elijah would respond by saying yeah, Jezebel let me tell you lady, your days are numbered, and I don't care how many times you threaten me, it doesn't mean a thing to me and on, and on and on. That's not what happens.

It says in verse 3, "*Then he was afraid, (He was overcome with fear) and (it says) he arose and (he) ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, (Remember, he was up in the northern kingdom of Israel. So now he's*

gone south, down into the southern kingdom of Judah. But he's not going to stop there) *and* (it says he) *left his servant there.* ⁴ (And then) *...he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree.* And (Look at this. This tells you where he's at emotionally. 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.""*

And what we see here very clearly is that Elijah has fallen into a very deep and dark depression, and this is the part that, on the one hand, excites me from the standpoint that we get to see how God's servants experience these same sorts of things that we experience. But we also get to see how the Lord is going to bring them out of it. And we're going to get some very important insights here about dealing with depression and the disappointment that leads to depression. And by the way, there's kind of a classic progression here that we know that we see in our own lives.

And Elijah, what's his first emotion when he gets this messenger from Jezebel? It's fear, isn't it? It says, *"he was afraid."* So the first thing he feels is fear. And now, we then see him in this deep, dark depression. But we know that there's actually an intermediary stage between fear and even sadness and the depths of despair or depression. And that is usually disappointment and discouragement. Boy, discouragement is a terrible thing to feel. You know, when you feel discouraged with life or with yourself.

In Elijah's case it's with himself. He is totally discouraged about himself, and you can see it by what he says to the Lord. He says, you know what, just kill me. Just take me. He literally prays for God to take his life saying I'm no better than my fathers. And I'm not sure exactly what Elijah believed about himself up to this point but apparently, he believed that he was better than his fathers. But now he's been shown in no uncertain terms that he's not. And so, he wants to die.

And I don't know if you've ever gotten to the point in life where you've prayed for God to take your life, but it's not a fun place to be. It's not a fun place to be at all. And you can see very clearly in what he says here that Elijah, he recognizes his own failure here and the implications of it, and they're overwhelming.

And it says in verse 5 that he just, *"And he lay down and slept..."* And by the way, that's often another symptom of depression. And we've seen that many times, that people will just go to bed, sometimes in the middle of the day. And they are so depressed and just this fatigue comes over them and all they want to

do is sleep. And people who are depressed can sleep 20 hours a day. Get up to go to the bathroom, have a meal, go back to bed. And I've heard of people doing just that.

But he lays down to sleep, “...under a (this) broom tree. (And it tells us here in the middle of verse 5, that) *And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.”*⁶ *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 (then) lay down again.”*

Here an angel takes care of him and this isn't enough to pull him out of this depression that he's in. I don't know how you'd feel if an angel showed up and served you a little Applebees on a tray or something like that. And I'd be excited about the fact that, wow, this is an angel who literally has awakened me and served me food to get me kind of back on my feet again. But he's hardly even moved by this. He eats and drinks and then he goes back to sleep again. And that's what depressed people do, by the way.

And verse 7 tells us, “*And the angel of the Lord came again a second time (we don't know how many hours later) and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.”*⁸ *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.”*

Now stop there for a moment and let's talk about this because there's a few interesting things that we need to take note of here along the way. And the first interesting thing to note is that instead of confronting Elijah, and God is going to confront Elijah. But not yet. Instead of doing it at this point, the Lord knows that He needs to be rested and refreshed. And so the Lord provides for him along those lines.

And I think that that's an interesting way that the Lord first of all addresses this deep depression in his life. He says, here, you need to build up your strength. You need to eat and you need to drink. And then when he lays down. You notice the angel doesn't smack him on the side and say, now listen buddy, knock this stuff off. Just get up and start being productive. He lets him go back to sleep but wakes him up a little bit later and says, here, you need to get up and eat and drink.

And it says that from the food that God gave him that, Elijah traveled then for “*forty days and forty nights*” and came “*to Horeb, the mount of God.*” And by the way, Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, which is, of course, where

Israel stopped on their way from Egypt after being released from their slavery in Egypt. They made their way through the wilderness and came to Mount Sinai, and you'll remember it was at Mount Sinai where God delivered to them the Ten Commandments. Gave them the Law.

It's interesting, isn't it, that the journey took Israel forty days and forty nights. That number forty is obviously very significant, points us back to the nation of Israel because it was forty years for the nation of Israel that they wandered in the wilderness before finally coming to the promised land.

And by the way, let's remind ourselves why Israel spent a total of forty years in the wilderness, shall we? It's because they came to Kadesh Barnea to enter into the land and what happened? Because of their fear and their lack of faith they couldn't enter the land, right?

So, God says, fine, you're going to turn around and go back to the wilderness, and they actually had already spent two years receiving the Law. So, He said, you're going to go back and spend another thirty eight years, a total of forty years before you're able to go into the land. Interesting sort of a thing.

We've often likened this whole idea of wandering in the wilderness to the spiritual condition of many people, frankly, even believers who struggle in the area of trusting God. Who struggle in the area of putting their faith in God. Who struggle in the area of fear, and really, truly giving God those fears. And they often have a wilderness journey on their hands. Because that wilderness journey, remember, is all part of the process of coming to a place of faith.

I know a lot of Christians, frankly, I mean, and I'll bet you do too. You might even be one of them. I know Christians who are, they live in the wilderness. They're saved. They're saved as it relates to the sin that they've committed in their lives, and they've put their faith in Jesus Christ, and they believe, and they know without a shadow that Jesus died on the cross for them. They are born again and on their way to heaven, but in the here and now they are living in the wilderness. They literally wander in the wilderness.

And the reason is because they have this crazy paradoxical sort of a disconnect in their minds concerning faith. They have enough faith to trust God for the forgiveness of their sins, but they don't have enough faith to trust God for their today, for their daily bread. And they live in a perpetual state of fear. They're afraid of everything, and they may not even be aware of it. Some of them are, and they, and because of it, they wander in the wilderness.

And it's one of the most amazing things to watch a Christian who's been living in the wilderness finally come out. Finally get to that place in their lives where they surrender their fears to God and they begin to truly trust Him for their day-to-day needs, their daily bread in such a way as to believe without a shadow of doubt that God is there to take care of them no matter what. And they rise to a new level of faith in their daily existence. And it's an exciting thing to see in their lives. And they begin to be filled with a kind of joy that is just unmistakable.

But boy, I tell you, that time in the wilderness, that is not fun. And Israel wandered in the wilderness after coming to the promised land for the first time because of the fear and the lack of faith that would not allow them to enter.

And now here we have Elijah who has been overcome with fear and did not have enough faith to face this woman, Jezebel, and he is right there too. Right there in the wilderness. And boy, fear will do that to you and a lack of faith that goes with it. I shouldn't just say fear because we all deal with fear from time to time. It's how we respond to fear that makes the difference, isn't it? Right?

I mean, we all deal with fear. The question is, do we apply faith? Do we put our faith in the place where fear would otherwise dominate our lives? Look at verse 9. So, Elijah comes all the way to Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai, and it says, then, *“There he came to a cave and lodged (just moved) in it...”*

By the way, there's something that's good about this too. And God, well, God's going to use it for good. This is all kind of happening because of fear and a lack of faith. But you know what Elijah is doing here? He's on a one man retreat.

And there's nothing wrong with a retreat from time to time because well, if your retreat is to go spend time with the Lord. And God is going to make sure that Elijah experiences the power and presence of God on this retreat.

Our women are getting ready to go on a retreat here in about nine days or so and we're excited and we're praying that God is going to use this time as an opportunity for the women to meet with God up there near McCall, and to really experience the power of His presence. And it's exciting many times to have the women come home after a retreat and hear the testimonies of how God has changed lives when the women go up there.

Getting away on a retreat is not a bad thing as long as you're not retreating from life so that you can just live in your depression. Being depressed, okay, so you're depressed. So go on a retreat and go meet God. Go meet with God.

Can I just give you the answer in case you came here with all wondering what the answer is to dealing with depression? You need to meet with God. There's the answer in a nutshell. You need to meet with God and that may sound like a trite answer I don't mean it to.

We'll see how it takes hold in Elijah's life here while he's on his retreat. But it says here in the middle of verse 9, “...*behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”*”

There is a time to confront someone who is locked in a state of depression. There's a time to ask the question. What are you doing here? Okay? But notice how the Lord took time first to allow him to be rested and refreshed, and then it's like, okay, we're on a retreat and now it's time. And that's what a time of retreat should be. It should be a time of confrontation.

We go on a retreat and it's not all fun, is it sometimes? Because we're confronted with who we are and the things that we've got in our lives that need to be addressed before the Lord. That's why a retreat is so powerfully useful in the hands of the Lord.

God says to him, what do you, “*What are you doing here?*” Well, let's see how, verse 10, how the Lord or how Elijah replies. he said, “*He said, (And you can almost hear this read this in a monotone) “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.”*”

What do you hear, by the way, in Elijah's response? For starters, what you don't hear is a straight answer. He doesn't answer the Lord. The Lord's question was, what are you doing here? And he doesn't give Him a straight answer. Instead, he throws out a complaint. And Elijah basically just says, I've encountered many trials, and I've been faithful to you up to this point.

And, but there are some things that his response reveals to us. And one of them is pride and the other is self-pity. And both of them are some really deep pits to fall into.

We understand the essence of his pride from his earlier statement when he said, you know, I'm no better than my fathers, so just kill me now. As if God didn't know that he was the same as his fathers. As if God didn't know. Do you think God didn't know when he called Elijah? Do you think God really looked at

Elijah and said, ah, now here, here we've got one. This guy is just a specimen of perfection.

I don't know, maybe Elijah got to the place of thinking that about himself, or at least he thought more highly of himself than his forefathers. But the revelation of this failure in his life brought him to his knees and allowed him to see himself as he really was, and he's devastated by the revelation. And that often is what happens when we become disappointed in ourselves, is that our expectation of ourselves was perhaps too high.

Do we really understand, I have a sinful nature, and the potential of my sin is off the charts. But we don't usually think of that way about ourselves. Maybe we'd be depressed all the time if we did. But the fact of the matter is that's why we say to people when we hear what they've did and we say, how could they? That's why that comes out of our mouth because we somehow think we're better. And it's pride. It's nothing short of pride, but you can also hear this self-pity too, in his response.

Notice too, that he, at the very end of that verse there, he says, *“and I'm the only one left of all the prophets, all the faithful men of God, and they seek my life.”* Notice he says, they seek my life. Actually, it was just Jezebel. He got a poison pen letter from one person but yet he's exaggerating the situation to make it sound worse than it is actually. He says they're all out to get me there, you know, they want to kill me, and so forth. But isn't that interesting? Doesn't depression do that for you?

I've experienced depression in my life, and I can tell you that when I am depressed, everything is dark. You hear about people putting, or seeing life through rose colored glasses, which is always a picture of somebody who sees things on a positive sort of a spin. But isn't it interesting, when you're depressed, nothing is good, right? Isn't that right? Isn't that the way it is for you? That's the way it is for me.

When I am discouraged and either flirting with depression or actually depressed, it doesn't matter what I look at, it's not good enough. The sky cannot possibly be blue enough to please me. Nothing is going to please me and that's the way it is. And that's kind of what you hear out of Elijah as he talks to the Lord about this thing.

And by the way, he says to the Lord, and I alone am faithful. You know what God could have said to him? Well, if you're so faithful, why are you here? Why

aren't you back there doing the ministry I called you to do? But the Lord doesn't say that. He's very gracious.

Verse 11. All the Lord says to Elijah here is, "... *Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.*" (and it says) *And behold, the LORD passed by,...*" And by the way, this is another interesting reference to the Lord passed by Moses in this same spot and declared Himself. You might remember that in Exodus chapter 33.

And look at what happens. We're in the middle of verse 11. It says, "...*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.* (In other words, the voice of God was not in the wind. The message of the Lord was not in the wind) *And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.*" Again, no message for Elijah. It was just an earthquake.

¹² *And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire.* (So, you've dealt with wind and earthquake and fire. And still, in none of these did the Lord have a direct message for Elijah. *And* (it says that) *after the fire the sound of a low whisper.* ¹³ *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,* (and it's the same question) *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

And you know, God will keep bringing you past the same mile post until you deal with it. And he's going to ask for a second time, Elijah. Elijah, what are you doing here? And he says, verse 14, "... *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.*"

Sounds like a little bit of a broken record, but it's also very self-centered and frankly, an evasive reply to the question the Lord is posing before him. ¹⁵ *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."*

Now stop there for just a moment. We're going to see in the next chapter that Syria actually already had a king. His name was Ben-Hadad. And so this was the Lord's way of telling Elijah, I've got more work for you to do. And you are going to be right in the middle of a power shift in the region.

Now remember, Syria is a gentile nation. It still exists today. But God is speaking to Elijah about the things that are still left to do. And by the way, Hazael was a servant of king Ben-Hadad, but yet he is about to be promoted to be king, and Elijah is going to be there to anoint him.

Verse 16, *“And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, (Jehu, by the way, was the captain of the army of Israel under king Ahab and Elijah was going to anoint him. And finally, he says) and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.”*

The final thing the Lord tells Elijah he's going to do is actually anoint his successor. And he tells him in verse 17 and 18, *“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.”*¹⁸ *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.”* And by the way, that phrase, *“I will leave,”* means, I reserve for myself, which is how the NIV renders it.

But in this final word from the Lord, Elijah is being reminded that he was not alone in his faithfulness to God. God says to him, first of all, I've got a plan. And this is what comes from when you and I come into the presence of the Lord.

You see, the issue when we get depressed isn't that God isn't able to help us. It's that we don't take the opportunity to have that retreat with God and come into His presence and to seek His face.

But when Elijah finally does, what does God reveal? God reveals, first of all, I have a plan. I have a plan. And there's this man named Hazael who's going to be anointed king of Syria and you're going to do the anointing. And then you're going to anoint a new king of Israel, his name is Jehu. And then you're going to anoint your own successor, his name will be Elisha. And the people who escape, Hazael, and Jehu, and da, da, da.

And God says, I have a plan. And man, I'll tell you. What that does to you and I when we realize that God has a plan. It's a powerful experience with the Lord.

And there's probably some other lessons that we can extract from this experience that Elijah had with the wind and the earthquake and the fire. You look at that and you go, so what was that all about? Was God just putting on a light show? Was that just to, I don't know, rattle Elijah a little bit? I mean, what was that all about?

There was the wind, but the Lord wasn't in the wind, and the earthquake, but the Lord wasn't in the earthquake and then the fire. Why? Well, then why do it? If the Lord wasn't in it, then why do it?

Well, I think that there's a lesson that is important that we don't miss here. It's something that is actually reiterated in the New Testament, and the lesson is this. If we're not careful Christians, we will miss the Kingdom of God.

Do you remember when Jesus was confronted by the religious leaders and He would make statements like the Kingdom of God is among you and they'd say, okay, what do you mean by that? The Kingdom of God is among you. What do you mean? And Jesus would say things like, the Kingdom doesn't come in ways that you would otherwise perceive. And then He told a whole bunch of parables about the Kingdom. You remember that. And sometimes the Kingdom is working in imperceptible ways.

You remember how Jesus talked to Nicodemus about the Holy Spirit coming, bringing new birth upon people. He said, the Spirit blows wherever it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it's coming or where it's going. So it is with the Spirit depositing life on people. We don't even, we're not even aware because we're so fixated and focused on the dramatic.

Do you know that the enemy wants to bring drama into your life so that you will not be able to perceive the Kingdom of God? Because the Kingdom of God is almost imperceptible, unless your eyes are open, unless you're really truly open.

Oh, there's so many people that just, and they're so vocal. Some people come to church on a Sunday or whatever, and they, you've heard it maybe. Somebody comes to church and then they leave church. They go, well, boy the Lord didn't seem to be in that service today. And one of the reasons people say that is because it doesn't meet some standard or expectation in their mind of what the Lord meeting us in a service ought to be like. And what they're, and those statements usually come from people who are fixated on wind, earthquakes and fire from a spiritual perspective.

And they're looking for the dynamics, and the drama, and the suspense, and the colossal, the stuff that they can kind of hone in on, and say, whoa, that was amazing! God moved so powerfully today! They can't even begin to tell you what the pastor even said. They don't know what the message was. All they know is, whoa, that was great. The Spirit of God just moved. The fact of the matter is, what they're pointing to was the earthquake, the fire, and the wind. But what they have completely missed is the still small voice of God.

And one of the things you see here in this passage is that all these tremendously powerful, suspenseful, colossal things take place, and the Lord wasn't in it. And suddenly there's this sound like a whisper, like a soft whisper, and Elijah instantly recognizes the presence of God in the whisper. And he is so overcome, he takes his cloak and throws it over his face. He can't, he knows he's not worthy to even have his face uncovered as he approaches this thing and comes out to the mouth of the cave and the Lord begins to speak to him now, in this powerful and still small voice.

This is the thing that we just don't get. We read about it, but we just don't get it. Let me show you a passage from 1 Corinthians where Paul says, you know what?

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 (ESV)

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what (things that are) is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things (look at this) that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, (Isn't that crazy?) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

So, what does God use? The things that this world thinks are not, not important, not big, not exciting, not wonderful. Now, listen, people, please understand, I am not saying that God can't do amazing, exciting things. But you know what? It's usually not the standard. It's often an exception.

But if you and I are going to go around and just long for those experiences of excitement we are going to miss the real true Kingdom of God in that still small voice, and it's something we need to think about. And by the way, one other thing I do want to mention about depression before we move on.

We talked earlier about David, and you know that David was no stranger to depression and discouragement and the discouragement that brings on depression. And there's a particular Psalm where he wrote about it. And it's really interesting because he actually spoke to his soul.

You guys know that your soul is your seat of your emotions and your intellect. And they become discouraged, and those things just become, it just gives into

depression and it can affect you physically as well. But here's what David says. Psalm 42, look at this. He says,

Psalm 42:5-6, 9, 11 (ESV)

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you... I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. (But here's what's going on. He says) My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you.... I say to God, my rock: “Why (Why) have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”

Listen, you might want to make a note on Psalm 42 in your Bible and it's not a super long Psalm and I've given you some of the key verses right there, but this is such a powerful Psalm because David has this amazing reaction to difficulty in his life. He gives himself a pep talk. Have you ever noticed that?

When I'm depressed, and when I'm discouraged, I usually don't say positive things. I say fairly negative things. But look what David says. He basically says, when I feel like this therefore, I will remember you. My soul is cast down within me, so I'm going to remember you.

In other words, David says, I'm going to take steps to rectify this situation. I'm going to take steps to get back where I need to be. I'm going to remember the Lord in my life. I'm going to remember His power, His ability.

Notice what he says earlier on in the Psalm. He says, *“I shall yet again praise him”* he's telling himself. Isn't that interesting? When we're depressed, when we're discouraged, do you know what we think? It's never going to change. Right? That's what we think. This will never change.

Sometimes, when Sue and I have had, like, a bad cold or something for two or three days, it's like, it takes me about 48 hours, and I believe within myself I will be sick for the rest of my life. I'm serious. Takes about 2 days and I assume that that will be my condition until I expire. I will never feel better. And Sue

will say to me, she'll say, you won't always feel this way. And I look at her like, really? And sometimes I have to say the same thing to her that you're not always going to feel this way.

We need to hear that, don't we? David was able to say it to himself. You're not always going to feel this way. You will praise the Lord again. You will lift up your voice. You will cry out to the Lord, your God. You will rejoice in His presence again. But David took steps. He didn't just wallow, and that, people, is the difference. David experienced depression. He just chose not to wallow in it.

And many times, let's face it, that's what we do, we wallow. Because it's just kind of fun to pout, and that by the way is self-pity. It's wallowing in self-pity. And sometimes we need a brother or sister to come alongside us and say, Elijah, what are you doing here? Right?

Look at verse 19. Elijah is going to obey the Lord to go back and pick up his ministry. *“So he departed from there and (Lo and behold he) 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.”*

Didn't even say anything to him, just... Wouldn't that be weird? I mean, first of all, the guy's a farmer, not that that's a bad thing, but it's not what you would expect, isn't it? I find that interesting.

God does things that we don't expect. Who does he raise up to be the successor of the prophet Elijah, a farmer, a simple farmer. And so, Elijah walks up to the guy and takes his cloak, which is a symbol of the mantle of anointing that he has, and he puts it over his shoulders and walks away. Which is a little strange, but that's how he communicates to him the Lord has called you to this ministry.

And it says in verse 20, *“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?””*

Now that sounds weird, doesn't it? To you and I, to our American way of thinking. But basically, what he's saying to him, first of all, Elisha is saying, let me go back and kiss my mom and dad goodbye.

And by the way, this sounds a lot like that negative story that Jesus told, or what we're told in the narrative where somebody said to Jesus, I'll follow you but let me go back and bury my father. And Jesus said, let the dead bury their own dead, right? And we all look at that and go, wow, that's a little harsh. He can't

even go back and bury his dad. His dad wasn't dead yet. He's basically putting off serving the Lord. He's saying, let me go back and I'll just be with my dad for the rest of his life. And then once everything is convenient to do I'll come and follow you. And so, you see that person was putting off following the Lord.

But what Elisha is doing is he's basically saying, I just want to go back and say goodbye to mom and dad. And Elijah, his response is, hey, it's not me that called you buddy. It's God. You can do whatever you want to do, whether you decide to follow me today, tomorrow, or never. That's between you and God. And I like that. I kind of like that attitude.

There's a point in time where we share the Word of the Lord with somebody, and we pray for them and stuff like that. But what they do with it is their responsibility. And so he says, hey, do what you think is best sort of a thing. And I want you to notice then what Elisha goes back to do. Check this out.

Verse 21. It says, “*And (Elisha) he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and...*” he killed them. That's like guys, if you're a farmer, that's taking your tractor apart and selling it part by part. In other words, he's saying in no uncertain terms, I'm getting out of the biz. He's burning his bridges behind him.

In fact, he “*sacrificed them (with the yokes) 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 assisted him.*”

And basically, this is Elisha saying, I'm getting out of the farming business because God has called me into the ministry, and I'm never going to turn back again. I'm never going to go back again.

So you see how different this is from that story that Jesus told? It is a very different sort of a situation. He was actually eliminating any possibility of returning to his previous life as a farmer. Alright, now what's happening?

Verse 1 of chapter 20 says that, “*Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his army together. Thirty-two kings were with him, and horses and chariots. And he went up and closed in on Samaria and fought against it.*”

Now, remember, Samaria is the capital now of the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom of Israel. So now you have Syria coming down to Samaria, the capital of Israel, and essentially, laying siege to the city. All right.

² “And he sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel and said to him, “Thus says Ben-hadad: ³ ‘Your silver and your gold are mine; your best wives and children also are mine.’” ⁴ And the king of Israel answered, “As you say, my lord, O king, I am yours, and all that I have.”” That’s kind of a weenie response, isn’t it? I mean he doesn’t even put up a fight.

We don't know how long Ben-hadad set up his siege against the northern kingdom of Israel. But however long it was or wasn't, king Ahab doesn't believe there's any possible way he can win with this Syrian king who is allied with 32 other kings. And he basically just says, okay, I'll agree to your terms.

And ⁵ “The messengers came (back) again and said, (yeah that was a little easy) “Thus says Ben-hadad: ‘I sent to you, saying, “Deliver to me your silver and your gold, your wives and your children.”’ ⁶ Nevertheless I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house and the houses of your servants and lay hands on whatever pleases you and take it away.’”

In other words, Ben-hadad has upped the ante and said, Oh, in that case, we're going to come in and take everything that belongs to your people, your nobles, and so forth.

⁷ “Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land and said, “Mark, now, and see how this man is seeking trouble, for he sent to me for my wives and my children, and for my silver and my gold, and I did not refuse him.” ⁸ And all the elders and all the people said to him, “Do not listen or consent.” ⁹ So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, “Tell my lord the king, ‘All that you first demanded of your servant I will do, but this thing I cannot do.’” (In other words, you've pushed too far) And the messengers departed and brought him word again.

¹⁰ Ben-hadad sent to him and said, “The gods do so to me and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me.” In other words I’m going to reduce the city to dust and there won’t even be hardly enough for a handful.

¹¹ And the king of Israel answered, “Tell him, ‘Let not him who straps on his armor boast himself as he who takes it off.’” Just remember that you can say that to somebody someday. Oh, yeah. Actually, what it means is hey, buddy, you count your chickens before they hatch, exactly what he's saying.

“¹² When Ben-hadad heard this message as he was drinking with the kings in the booths, he said to his men, “Take your positions.” And they took their positions against the city. ¹³ And behold, a prophet (we don’t know which one) came near to Ahab king of Israel and said, “Thus says the Lord, Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will give it into your hand this day, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” ¹⁴ And Ahab said, “By whom?” He said, “Thus says the Lord, By the servants of the governors of the districts””

And by the way, the governors of the districts were people who were put in charge of different districts of Israel under king Solomon. Solomon was very orderly, and he established regional districts in Israel, and they apparently stayed up to this point. And so, God is saying, these various governors will lead the battle or, well, actually they'll go into battle with you, and they'll take their people and so forth and fight.

And *“¹⁴ “Then he said, “Who shall begin the battle?” He answered, “You.””* Now that requires a little faith because Ahab is being told here he's going to lead the group that actually goes against this army.

And, *“¹⁵ Then he mustered the servants of the governors of the districts, and they were 232. And after them he mustered all the people of Israel, seven thousand. ¹⁶ And they went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the booths, he and the thirty-two kings who helped him.”* Obviously Ben-hadad didn't think there was any threat, because he's drinking at noon.

“¹⁷ The servants of the governors of the districts went out first. And Ben-hadad sent out scouts, and they reported to him, “Men are coming out from Samaria.”

¹⁸ He said, (okay) “If they have come out for peace, take them alive. Or if they have come out for war, take them alive.” ¹⁹ So these went out of the city, the servants of the governors of the districts and the army that followed them. ²⁰ And each struck down his man. The Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them, but Ben-hadad king of Syria escaped on a horse with horsemen. ²¹ And the king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and struck the Syrians with a great blow. ²² Then the prophet came near to the king of Israel and said to him, “Come, strengthen yourself, and consider well what you have to do, for in the spring the king of Syria will come up against you.”

And what he's being told, king Ahab is being told, okay, you had a victory here, but come spring the king of Syria is going to try it again. He's going to muster

his army, so you need to come back, get yourself strengthened up and get ready for this attack in the spring.

²³ *“And the servants of the king of Syria said to him, ...”* Now, check this out, and this is something God is going to use against them This is the servants of the king of Syria. They're pagans. They come to the king and they go. Okay, here's the deal, this is why we lost. *“Their gods are gods of the hills, and so they were stronger than we. But let us fight against them in the plain, (Or in the low region. Because) and surely we shall be stronger than they.”* Because you see, our gods are stronger in the plain. Their gods are gods of the hills. That's what's happening here. Pure pagan thinking.

Oh, and they went on to say this. ²⁴ *“And do this: remove the kings, each from his post, and put commanders in their places, ²⁵ and muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot. (And) Then we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.”* And he listened to their voice and did so.” Because he was a pagan, and he figured, yeah, that sounds good to me.

²⁶ *In the spring, Ben-hadad mustered (this huge army) the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. ²⁷ And (all) the people of Israel were mustered and were provisioned and went against them. The people of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, but the Syrians filled the country.”* That tells you the difference in the sizes of their army.

²⁸ *And a man of God came near and said to the king of Israel, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because the Syrians have said, “The LORD is a god of the hills but he is not a god of the valleys,” therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.’” ²⁹ And they encamped opposite one another seven days. Then on the seventh day the battle was joined. And the people of Israel struck down of the Syrians (wow) 100,000 foot soldiers in one day. ³⁰ And the rest fled into the city of Aphek, and the wall fell upon 27,000 men who were left. Ben-hadad also fled and entered an inner chamber in the city.*

³¹ *And his servants said to him, “Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes on our heads and go out to the king of Israel. Perhaps he will spare your life.”* (Obviously, they figure there's nothing to lose) ³² *So they tied sackcloth around their waists and put ropes on their heads and went to the king of Israel and said, “Your servant Ben-hadad (notice how humble he is now, says) says, ‘Please, let me live.’” And he said, “Does he still live? He is my*

brother.”” That's king Ahab talking now. Yeah, that's king Ahab. He's like, really? He's still alive? He's my brother, we're brother kings.

“³³ Now the men were watching for a sign, and they quickly took it up from him and said, (oh yeah, yeah, yeah) “Yes, your brother Ben-hadad.” (That's right, he's your brother, yeah. And) Then he said, “Go and bring him.” Then Ben-hadad came out to him, and he caused him to come up into the chariot. ³⁴ And Ben-hadad said to him, “The cities that my father took from your father I will restore, (I'll give them back to you) and you may establish bazaars for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria.” And Ahab said, “I will let you go on these terms.” So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

³⁵ And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his fellow at the command of the Lord, (meaning a fellow prophet) “Strike me, please.” But the man refused to strike him. ³⁶ Then he said to him, “Because you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, behold, as soon as you have gone from me, a lion shall strike you down.” And as soon as he had departed from him, a lion met him and struck him down. ³⁷ Then he found another man and said, “Strike me, please.” And the man struck him—struck him and wounded him. ³⁸ So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes.

³⁹ And as the king passed, he cried to the king and said, “Your servant went out into the midst of the battle, and behold, a soldier turned and brought a man to me and said, ‘Guard this man; if by any means he is missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.’ ⁴⁰ And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” (In other words, he slipped away from me) The king of Israel said to him, (Fine) “So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it.”

In other words, you know what you just told me? You told me that the guy who put this man in your custody told you your life for his life. If you lose him. You have to forfeit your life. So you've told it, you've explained it to me, your life is forfeit.

“⁴¹ Then he (the prophet) hurried to take the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. ⁴² And he said to him, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction therefore your life shall be for his life, and your people for his people.’” ⁴³ And the king of Israel went to his house vexed and sullen and came to Samaria.”

And that's Ahab. And that's Ahab. Over the course of these two battles that we read about in this chapter, we saw a supernatural work of the Lord to bring Israel victory against a multitude of enemies. And Ahab responded in faith to the Word of the Lord. God told him how to go out and meet, and he did it. Ahab didn't say, well, I need to go find some help from somebody else or I'm not going to war.

Ahab followed the instruction of the Lord, and he was victorious. Two times in situations where he shouldn't have been victorious. He should have gotten creamed by the Syrian army, but he was victorious.

So what was his response? Was it to put his faith in God? Was it to trust in the Lord who had delivered him? No, not at all. And when he is confronted with the enemy, the king of Syria, he calls him his brother. Hey, you're my brother. We're buds. I'm going to let you go home. And the Lord comes back and says, I gave those armies into your hand because they were devoted to destruction. This was the will of the Lord that they might be destroyed.

But you let him go and so now your life is forfeit because you let this man go. And you'll notice that Ahab, after receiving this incredible work of God in his life, does not respond by saying, I repent of my sin. I repent of my faithless attitude. I repent of my weakness of the flesh. It says he went home, and he was sullen. In other words, he went home and pouted. That's what it means. He went home and pouted. He went home and had a pity party. It seems, it's so ridiculous, people's responses. How do we respond when we're confronted with our lives?

Do you know how merciful God is? One of the reasons that I'm never afraid of someone saying to me, you know, Paul, you're a sinner. It's because I know how merciful God is. I'm not going to get upset. First of all, I agree with him.

But second of all, I know that I can bring my sin to Him and I'll find forgiveness. I believe what the Bible says when it says, if we confess our sins, He's faithful and just and will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. I believe that. Do you believe that?

I hope so. Because if you do, you'll never be caught in this place where Ahab is where he's confronted with his sin, but he just pouts. Instead, we'll go to the Lord and say, Father, I confess to you, my sin. God goes, I forgive you. I forgive you. You're cleansed. You're washed. You're renewed. Ah, what a glorious thing it is to know the mercy of God. His mercies are new every morning.