

## OUT FROM THE CAVE: A Character Study from the Life of Elijah

As we delve into a brief period in the life of Elijah the prophet we will discover the reality of dark and depressive moments even in the life of God's chosen. We will also attempt to reveal insights from his journey and God's word that can help us to overcome the same darkness that seeks to envelop us all.

The truth for us all, despite of level of faith, the darkness of depression is real and can affect us all even when you are living in the light of God's grace. The goal for us as believers is to have the tools and resources of God's word to minimize the impact, decrease the frequency, and shorten the duration of these moments.

As a disclaimer this is not an attempt to "cure" depression, as many people truly have clinical and diagnosable depression that requires professional medical help and resources. It is an effort to discover God's purpose and design for our lives and to empower us to, like Elijah, come *Out From The Cave* and into the light of His presence and purpose (1 Kgs 17-19).

Elijah's experience reminds us that everyone is susceptible to depression and no one is immune; not Christians, the pastor or even the prophet. No matter our life-status and station we can all succumb to fear, doubt, and a sense of hopelessness that can rob us of our life's purpose and joy.

Even when we're walking with God, as Elijah was, we can still stumble and get lost in the wilderness of tangled emotions. But we don't have to stay there. Elijah's example reveals that God is always with us, even in the darkness of depression, and wants to move us from our cave of hopelessness.

From the outset, what we do know is that God never intended us to live in the void of darkness in the world or in our personal lives (Gen 1:1-5; Jn 1:1-5; 8:12, 12:46; 1 Ptr 2:9; Rev 21:23). Since this is true, we then therefore have to turn to God to experience the redemptive nature of His presence (Ps 34:17-18).

Unfortunately, depression has become the world's number one health problem, causing more deaths than cancer per year and ranking as the leading cause of disability. Whatever the causes and contributing factors, one thing is certain depression affects our lives in increasing measures.

No matter who we are, where we live, what we do for a living, our level of income or education, our ethnicity or gender it's possible that we will, at some point struggle with it. Depression does not discriminate.

It chokes us of purpose pleasure, purpose, joy, peace, happiness and contentment. It clouds our vision, sometimes quickly but often gradually. It prevents us from seeing ourselves, our lives, the blessings of God and if we're not careful it can keep us from seeing God Himself at work in all of these.

Clinically, medical advice, medication, and therapy are certainly useful and, in many instances, extremely necessary. In addition to those however, as believers, we have to be careful to not exclude the God factor from our pursuit of wholeness and wellness. Particularly since He is our

creator (Ps 100:3; Eph 2:8-10).

Medication and therapy alone can't address the greater need in our lives; walking in purpose, understanding our identity in Him, and embracing the power that is available to us (Rom 8:35-39). We all need these to help us understand that we weren't created to merely survive but to thrive.

When our understanding changes, so will our thought processes, our appetites, our language, our contexts, and how we embrace the environments that we are a part of. We have to have much higher goals than alleviating the pain or learning to live with it. Our goals must be to address the root cause of it.

Know this; darkness only comes from darkness; it does not come from light. And the only way to transform, alter, alleviate it is to expose and intensify the light. Even though it's not as simple, at times, as just quoting a verse or two we must believe there are answers to any and every life problem within the pages of scripture (Ps 119:105).

We are fundamentally spiritual beings in physical bodies who are created in the image of God, which means we need spiritual solutions as well as medical solutions. Because our spiritual health affects all parts of our being, including the physical emotional and mental, there must be healing wisdom and power in the Word of God.

This is why we look to the amazing story of Elijah, who experienced the highest of highs and the lowest of lows, sometimes one right after another. The grace of God is that He met Elijah right where he was and invited Elijah to step forward, his cave of darkness and depression, and embark upon a divinely appointed mission of renewal and purpose.

## OUT FROM THE CAVE: A Character Study from the Life of Elijah

This season in the life of the prophet Elijah reveals how everyone is susceptible to bouts of depression, situational or clinical (1 Kgs 19:1-18). Even when we're walking closely with God we can get lost in the wilderness of tangled emotions, depressive and negative thoughts, and experiences that drive us into caves of darkness.

Exploring the "*what*" of depression and darkness, we now have to look at the "*how*" of the same as one of the major considerations for coming Out From The Cave. To begin with, one of the greatest introspective questions we can ask of ourselves is "How did I get in the cave in the first place?".

The first step toward coming out of the cave of darkness and depressive thoughts is to recognize what sent you running there. This is the challenge of being open and honest enough with ourselves to consider the contributing factors that have led to these moments and seasons.

Our immediate assumption is that Elijah ran initially for his fear of Jezebel and the threat that she made upon his life, because of his victory atop Mt Carmel. While this may be the initial cause of his flight, we will discover that, like us, he also contributed to his own descent into the cave.

Many persons experiences with depression and darkness can come from circumstances beyond our control, from external sources and stimuli. As much as these are unwanted, uninvited, unexpected, and out of our control, there are several that, by the grace, Word, and Spirit of God we can have dominion over.

### Four Contributing Factors (Part 1)

The first contributing factor that helped drive Elijah into his cave of depression was his ***life imbalance***. This was his experience of going from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows (1 Kgs 19:1-4). One of the important notes in this factor is that depression can be a disease of lifestyle and choices.

Many experts (neurologists, psychiatrists, counselors, psychologists, and sociologists now conclude that depression (and anxiety) most often results from our lifestyle and choices. This is to suggest that in many cases (not all), despite those of neurological and hormonal affect, we are doing it to ourselves.

This is also to understand that if we want to win the fight against depression, one of the ways to do so is to accept the truth that we need make some changes in our habits and routines. With free will, we, like Elijah, have the capacity to make choices, knowing that by our choices we can live, or we can die (Deut 30:15-20; Jos 24:14-15; Phil 4:6-9).

Many of the factors that have been proven to cause depression and anxiety are not in our biology, some are in our theology. Some, consequently, are in the things we choose to embrace and the thoughts we choose to believe, and even in the speech that we choose to declare over our lives (19:4).

Once we understand how our lifestyle habits and choices negatively affect us mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually we gain a new set of options (in addition to medication if necessary). If we can recognize what we are *doing*; with God, we can find ways to change what we are *being* (Ps 119:9; Jn 17:17; Rom 12:2).

*“Remember, motions are the precursors of emotions” -Dr. George W. Crane, Applied Psychology*

Consider this; we control our motions. But on the other hand, it's our emotions that are much more difficult to understand, to navigate through, and to corral if necessary. Even with the control of our motions, the things we do, certain events and circumstances beyond our control trigger our emotions in ways we usually aren't prepared for.

If our motions can be controlled by our choices and emotions tend to follow our motions then the solution seems simple, right? We should just make better choices? It's much easier said than done. Yet, with the enabling of the Spirit, our being humble and truthful with ourselves we can make some drastic and identifiable changes (Jn 8:32).

This is what is considered as the difference between pivoting and paralysis. Pivoting, or making small adjustments, even baby steps, can create a shift in the way you feel. Paralysis is being stuck in our emotions until we have an extreme difficulty making any motions or movements even toward the *edge* of the cave.

If you think through actions that you could take to move forward even slightly when you're depressed, it can keep you from being stuck there. You may never feel like you can completely control your emotions or feelings the way you may want to, but you can do something to keep them from taking complete control.

Imagine the slight pivot, Elijah could've made at the pronouncement of the threat to his life from Jezebel's messenger to keep himself from being paralyzed. He left out the God option. He could've rehearsed God's word in his spirit. He could've countered the messenger's message. He could've prayed for God to intervene.

Whatever we do, we can't criticize ourselves for not feeling better immediately. We can know that we have a God and because we have Him, we have options. When it feels like depression and depressive thoughts are dragging you into the depths of the cave, you can surrender to its paralysis, or you can pivot and take action.

Finally, recognizing that you still have choices when you're feeling depressed, anxious, or overwhelmed is essential to leaving your cave and moving into the light of His presence and the restoration of His purpose for your life.

## OUT FROM THE CAVE A Character Study from the Life of Elijah Pt 3

Few emotions can so quickly expose our human frailty like the feeling of despair; this feeling of hopelessness can drive us far and deep into the caves of darkness and depression. The battle of the heart and mind is one of the toughest battles a person ever faces, and Elijah would fight this battle in a cave (1 Kgs 19:1-18).

One of the ways to deal with bouts of darkness and depression is an honest assessment of the things that have led to or driven us into these experiences. Self-inflicted or “others-induced”, there are always contributing factors; some we can address on our own and some we may need intervention; divine or otherwise.

Of the first of many factors that lead to darkness and depression, life imbalance, is addressable by our attempts to make better choices and decisions. Understanding how our lifestyle habits and choices negatively affect us mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually gives us a new set of options. The ultimate option is choosing life God’s way.

This “self-inventory” can help us find and maintain a balanced life by helping us discern what’s essential, what’s helping, what’s hurting, what’s illuminating, what’s darkening. It’s asking what patterns do I see? What’s affecting my emotions positively? Negatively? How can I change or redirect what’s costing me too much energy, time, and focus?

Upon careful consideration and humbly honest answers we are then postured to begin making some small *motions* that can alter our *emotions* in a healthy manner. It’s to this end that we consider other contributing factors and the adjustments or pivots that we can make (James 4:17).

### Four Contributing Factors (Part 2)

In addition to Elijah’s life imbalance, the second of the four contributing factors that may have played a role in his cave experience is the **curse of comparison** (1 Kgs 19:4). One of the most telling proofs of this contributor is that it is what Elijah has spoken over his own life and more specifically what he asks of God.

*Comparison is the death of joy!* -Mark Twain. *Comparison is the thief of joy!* -Theodore Roosevelt

This seeming admission of Elijah’s failure was his way of comparing himself to the failures of his ancestors. If he had done no better to stand against the enemy, he must’ve been worse. The faith that had fueled his life as God’s prophet suddenly evaporated in his desert of despair and he concluded that he was as fickle just like every other Israelite.

This same experience of being caught up in the *comparison culture* is what far too many people suffer with today; believers and non-believers alike. As unique as his calling, vocation, life, and experience was in this season, getting caught up in this comparison trap only made him more depressed.

This is what happens when we care too much about what others are doing (Ecc 4:4). It happens when we care too much about what others are thinking (Prov 29:25 GNT). It happens when our self-worth and self-esteem hinges on winning a cultural competition that is rigged and was never meant for anyone wot win in the first place.

The only way to get off this treadmill, running in place to nowhere, is to see ourselves the way God sees us and to see others the way God sees them. We must learn to value ourselves and others for who we are: children of God created in His holy image (Gen 1:27) and be shaped into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29)

Knowing our uniqueness, who we are as individuals in Him, how we're created, wired, gifted, anointed, blessed, etc. will help keep us from unhealthy comparisons. Too often, we judge ourselves in the moment while God sees us from His omniscient, eternal perspective (Deut 28:13; Ps 139; Jer 1:5; 1 Ptr 2:9).

What the enemy does is holds out the illusion of something better, and we end up desiring the deception over the uniqueness of God's truth (Gen 3:5). This is the ultimate comparison trap that ensnares us to and leaves us with the depressing feeling of unfulfillment and dissatisfaction.

When we compare ourselves (or let others compare us) to others; our ancestors, our enemy, the one we admire, the popular, the "successful" we will always end up with the same conclusion. We will never be good enough, smart enough, wealthy enough, attractive enough, powerful enough, or special enough. All lies!

Too often we compare our weaknesses to others strengths, focus on our deficits rather than our values, fall into the thought-trap of self-labeling, and assume others have better lives than ours. All of these can be a slap in the face of a God who has specifically and intricately graced us to be who we are.

Envy is a sin (Gal 5:19–21; Rom 1:29). It makes contentment impossible. By its very nature, envy always compares and guarantees dissatisfaction (Prov 14:30). When envy taints our attitude and outlook, we develop unrealistic (often impossible) expectations. When those expectations go unfulfilled all kinds of emotions creep in.

Envy can leave us in a vicious cycle: we compare, feel we don't measure up, get what will soothe us for the moment, feel disappointed, compare again, repeat! The truth is: Enough is never enough. This is why it's God's purpose that we be content with who he has made us to be (Ps 100; 1 Tim 6:6-10).

From this moment in the life of Elijah we must learn to avoid the trap of considering ourselves in the light of any other, because it can lead us into the depths of darkness. Unfortunately, Elijah still compared himself to his ancestors and felt like he wanted to die. Coming out of our cave means we have stop comparing, because God made you incomparable!

## OUT FROM THE CAVE A Character Study from the Life of Elijah Pt 4

Numerous factors contributed to Elijah's descent into the cave of depression, the first of which was his life imbalance; from His mountaintop victory to a lonely place without support. Second, Elijah was too concerned with his comparison to others. The curse of comparison gets us stuck in our heads, stuck on thoughts that send us into our cave.

As we saw with Elijah (1 Kgs 19:1-4), comparison often leads to thoughts and feeling that, if unchecked, can serve as tinder for depression. When we look at others, it's tempting to consider or assume "comparatively" that they have a better, easier, or more prosperous and enjoyable life.

Tragically, focusing on our *perception* of the successes of others will only lead to feelings of insecurity, envy, self-criticism, and personal failure. Much of which will not be based on Truth (Ps 73:1-17). Comparison is detrimental to godly confidence (Jer 29:11; Phil 1:6) and contentment (1 Tim 6:6-10; 1 Peter 5:6-7).

This is what can lead to what we call "getting into our feelings. It's the idea that we become driven by our emotions; whether they are truthful and justified or not. These same thought-inspired emotions can drive us into our cave of darkness and depression. This is why confronting our thoughts with Truth is essential.

*Ninety-five percent of your emotions are determined by the way you talk to yourself.* -Brian Tracy

### Four Contributing Factors (Part 3)

Because we will eventually speak what we think or feel, or even become what we think or feel, we have to be wary of *negative self-talk* (Mt 12:33-37). According to experts, it's called "rumination" and is the instinctive human response to replay our recent trials and troubles over and over again before we can move on.

This deep pondering describes how we can get fixated on certain thoughts and events and it usually leads to mental and emotional *paralysis* and keeps us from *pivoting*. It's a trap that forces us to get stuck on the symptoms of our distress rather than looking for solutions to our distress.

Research has shown that habitual rumination results in many negative consequences, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and addictions. Recognizing that we are in this rumination rut, is the first to getting ourselves out of our heads, out of our emotions and eventually out of our cave experiences.

One of the reasons that Elijah may have sank into depression could have been his rumination. It's likely what led him to isolate himself and get into his own head. Rumination leads to ruination; by allowing our feelings to define our lives and dictate our actions, making us harder on ourselves than we should be, and causes us to exaggerate the negative.

1. In general, too often we allow our feelings to control us; to influence and determine the choices we make, the actions we take, and the habits we make or break. This is what causes us to buy into the false narratives that we create with recognizing their unreliability, inconsistency and inaccuracy.



As children of God we have to consider that what we feel is not always necessarily real. Instead of being emotion-led, we have to think about what is true factually and spiritually. We can not afford to live by our feelings instead of by the Word, Truth, and promises of God (2 Cor 1:20). It's His truth that sets us free.

2. One of the consequences of dwelling on our emotional state is that we prolong the process of recovering proper perspective. Instead of seeing ourselves the way God sees us, we see the labels of our past, of who others say we are, of our worst moments and biggest failures.

This leads to self-blame and taking unnecessary responsibility for things that are often beyond our control. Especially the actions of others (1 Kgs 19:10, 14). We have to be careful to not blame ourselves, and attempt to carry burdens that God never intended for us to bear (Gal 6:2; 1 Ptr 5:6-7).

3. With a far-reaching impact, one of the worst effects of rumination is the exaggeration or over exaggeration of the negative. Like Jezebel, the enemy, instead of attacking us directly, he turns our thoughts against us; accusing us, speaking fear and insecurities, and paralyzing us from knowing and seeking God's best.

We all struggle with this when we're in distress; sliding into emotional conclusions that either distort or exaggerate the facts without being objective. This is why it is extremely important to take control of our thoughts enroute to our mental recovery and wellness (Jer 17:9; Prov 3:5, 4:23; 2 Cor 10:5).

With the free-will God gave us, we can make other choices and find other perspectives, based upon the truth, instead of *chewing the cud* of our hurtful thoughts. Instead of chewing your thoughts, choose your thoughts (Phil 4:8-9). This is what helps diminish the power that rumination has to drive us toward depression.

We will never change our life, or even how we "*feel*" until we change the way we think (Jn 8:32). Knowing the truth reminds us of what's really going on and replaces old lies with eternal truth. We defeat the enemy from without and from within by replacing every lie with the truth of God's word (Jn 8:44; 2 Cor 10:3-5; Rom 12:2; Eph 4:22-23).

Know this; whatever you say to yourself is impressed deeper into your subconscious mind. The more you dwell on false narratives the more they become realized. Contrastingly, the more you dwell on the truth, the more truth grows and blossoms into freedom and life, leaving less room for lies and negativity.



## OUT FROM THE CAVE A Character Study from the Life of Elijah Pt 4

We have been discovering that with all the factors leading to Elijah's cave dwelling season of darkness and depression much of it was self-imposed or self-induced. Yes, Jezebel's threat was the chief contributor, but his response, handling, and reactions are his to own (1 Kgs 19:1-4).

From the imbalance of a poor theology, to the comparison curse, to the rumination of negative self-talk, he, in some sense, facilitated his downward spiral into the cave of depression. The challenge is to use discernment and awareness to identify these contributors early enough to combat them.

One of the ways in which we can overcome these is to be vulnerable enough to seek the help, insight and wisdom of others who may be used of God to help. Dangerously so, our natural instinct is to remove or separate ourselves from the experience and its context. Unfortunately, we often conflate this with removing ourselves from people.

### Four Contributing Factors (Part 4)

Elijah's self-imposed isolation (1 Kgs 19:3-4) is one of the major factors that cannot be ignored. As much as we believe that we have the strength to handle things on our own, we do not. One of the worst and/or most dangerous things we can do in response to difficult experiences, pains, and fears is to isolate ourselves.

An uncomfortable truth that often challenges our pride and ego is that in order to defeat depression and come out of our caves, we need each other more than ever. Social connections are the building blocks of human life. We need closeness and relationships, because without relationships we wither and fail to thrive.

It wasn't Elijah's physical distancing, or getting away from Ahab and Jezebel, that caused as much of his problem as did his "social-distancing". The first problem in scripture wasn't sin. It was the fact that, by His own admission, God only made one man; and seeing His *single* image-bearer He knew that his social-isolation wasn't good for him (Gen 2:18).

As great as the presence of God and the interaction with nature and the created order (was) is, we are made for direct human contact. We are not meant to be isolated creatures; instead, we are created for intimacy and connection. We all need someone(s) to do life together with, especially in difficult and dark times.

The cruelest & highest form of punishment in prison is called "solitary confinement" where the prison system locks people in rooms for extended amounts of time — alone! There is no social interaction with any other human beings, and the prisoner is left alone with his or her thoughts.

Isolation has and will always lead people to depression, anxiety and even suicide. We may never experience solitary confinement, but self-imposed isolation can feel like it. We learn from Elijah when we feel lonely and isolated, we're at greater risk for withdrawing even more (19:10).

He may have thought he needed solitude, but what Elijah was experiencing was isolation. Isolation is an evil twin of solitude. Being twins, they often get mistaken for one another. It's only when you see how they affect the world around them that you can begin to tell them apart.

There are great differences between solitude and isolation. Solitude is the intentional being alone with God and it gives life and isolation is forcibly being alone and it steals life. Solitude, with all its benefits, is not a place to live, but to visit frequently. Isolation, on the other hand should never be more than a pass through.

Solitude is good. It recharges the soul. It offers time for reflection and for prayer (Mt 6:6). And even when you're alone, if you're experiencing solitude, you are still connected (Lk 4:1-15). Solitude connects you to God, to yourself, and prepares you to be connected to others (Mk 1:35; Lk 6:12-13).

Solitude is the best way to defeat insecurity (Phil 4:6-7), the best way to defeat pride (James 4:10), the best way to receive comfort (2 Cor 1:3-7). Solitude is the best way to receive wisdom (James 1:5-8), and even puts you in a place to receive Heaven's secrets (1 Cor 2:6-10).

Isolation, on the other hand, is never replenishing. Isolation, from the Latin word *insula*, meaning island, can feel like solitude in the sense that you are alone, but isolation doesn't connect you to anyone. Isolation does what the word suggests – it cuts you off, from God, from others, and sometimes even from yourself.

Isolation can be so dangerous because we begin to “counsel” ourselves, ruminating on the causes and the contributors to our depression. Unfortunately, you're usually the last person you should listen to when you're isolated and struggling. Simply put, it's not good for us to be isolated.

We are wired to need relationships. Family. Friends. We are designed by God for connections and cooperation. We are created for intimacy. We function best in a tribe; a social community linked together by a common bond to accomplish something that we could never do on our own. Life. (Ps 68:6; 1 Ptr 3:8; Rom 12:4-5; Acts 2:42; Jn 21:16-17)

In these times need somebody from the fellowship, with a common experience, walking in the same direction, to also walk with you and talk with you and remind you that you are His own (Ecc 4:9-12). This is why Adam had Eve, Abraham had Lot, Moses had Aaron, David had Jonathan, Elijah had Elisha Naomi had Ruth, Paul had Timothy, and we have each other.

Foundational to every human being is relational connectedness with God and with others and this need never goes away (Mt 26:36-39). Vulnerability and transparency are necessary for intimacy to flourish, not only with the Lord but with one another. The truth is we need each other dirty feet and all (Jn 13:1-9).

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## OUT FROM THE CAVE A Character Study from the Life of Elijah Pt 4

Examining the four contributing factors that led to Elijah's depressive stint in the cave (1 Kings 19:1-10) helps us conclude that in these moments, we need help! Moments of theological error, unfair judgments from comparisons to others, negative rumination, and prolonged isolation all show that we need help from God but also from others.

Our ultimate source of strength, restoration, and salvation (temporal and eternal) is the God who has designed and created us (Ps 121:1-2). Subsequently, the expectation is we exist in communion and fellowship and be an additional source of strength, restoration, and salvation (Gal 6:1-2).

Jesus' example of washing the disciple's feet shows that ***we need people who care for us*** and that we need to learn how to care for others (Jn 13:14-15). Challenged by the self-care culture of today, our truth as believers is that, at the heart of Christianity is receiving and giving care (Jn 13:34-35).

Part of this care is embracing the idea that ***we need people who will encourage us***, not as "co-signers", but in the genuine attempts to stimulate our spirits. Yes, ultimately, God is our truest source of encouragement but he does not alleviate the need for us to be mutually encouraging to one another (1 Sam 30:6; 1 Thess 5:4-11; Heb 3:13).

If we are to become victorious in any of the battles we face ***we need people who will partner with us*** (Ex 17:8-13). Being a part of something larger than us is essential to our coming out from the cave (Vs.10). Connection to Christ as our life source also connects us to one another and makes "the whole more than its parts" (Jn 15:4-5).

Partners also help us see our blind spots (Lk 22:31-32). ***We need people who will protect us***, sometimes, and more often than we care to admit, from ourselves. The command to "love thy neighbor as thy self" could include the responsibility to look out for each other's spiritual health (Mt 22:36-40).

Because, as disciples, we need spiritual covering for protection and provision, ***we need people who will pray for us*** (Eph 6:13-18 MSG). This challenges us to be trusting and transparent, open and honest, about our mental and spiritual state of being, but it comes with great reward (James 5:13-20).

All of these become essential in our attempts to avoid entering and prolonging our stay in the cave of darkness and depression. Doing life together is also what God has purposed for us to help in our ability to fight against the enemy in the unseen spiritual realm that is *warring* against us in (Eph 6:12).

As we've seen, depression is multi-faceted with some biological, chemical, neurological, and other social, relational, and environmental components. The other, maybe more significant, component is spiritual, as it can be a battle for our very souls. Frankly, it is spiritual warfare and the enemy is always out to destroy us (1 Ptr 5:8).

Rarely is spiritual attack immediately obvious or out in the open, because the enemy, like a lion, likes to sneak up on us if possible. As uncomfortable as it may make us feel, the truth is that the enemy is real and he's determined to do everything he can to "steal, kill, and destroy (Jn 10:10).

One of three spiritual realities that can help us fight the enemy's darkness with the light and power of Christ is that we can't undermine the enemy's influence. He and his fallen angel's revel in derailing our relationship with God and distracting us from living our God-given purpose (Job 1; Rev 12:7-9).

Two other realities are off-setting in that, one, while the enemy certainly wants to destroy us, two, he must respond to a higher authority than himself (1 Jn 4:4). He may be considered an authority in high places, higher than our realm of influence, be we belong to and live in Him who Satan must bow to (Eph 1:15-22).

To counter these three realities, and to fight what's fighting us we have three spiritual weapons: The name of Jesus, The blood of Jesus, and the Word of God. The name of Jesus is the highest name in the heavens, every realm must submit to it, and it is the literal trump card over every contrary spirit and demonic force (1 Sam 17:45; Luke 10:17; Phil 2:10).

We can also claim the victory over sin and death that won for us by the blood of Jesus. Sin is the source of the enemy's power and sin brings about death. With His blood He paid the penalty for sin and His resurrection was the conquering of the power of death. Therefore, when we accept Christ, we overcome the enemy (Rev 12:11).

Our third and most readily available spiritual weapon is the Word of God. This is the weapon Jesus Himself used when fight against Satan in the wilderness. Knowing the word of God through study, memorization, and recitation is what helps us win spiritual battles. Actually, you can't win without it (Him).

With three aspects of spiritual warfare and three spiritual weapons in our arsenal we have to consider three daily practices to keep us postured for battle. First, we must daily submit ourselves to God. Our authority against the enemy is only as our relationship and connection to God (James 4:7-8; Acts 19:11-16).

Secondly, we have to learn how to close doors that give the enemy access and opportunity. Things like unforgiveness (2 Cor 2:10-11), anger (Eph 4:26-7), "innocent" fun (Eph 5:11) can all lead us into spells of darkness. If you wouldn't leave the doors to your home wide open, then why do so with the doors to your soul and well-being.

Thirdly, understand that Christianity is not passive (2 Cor 10:3-5). We can confront and take the enemy and his schemes head on when we live in the fortified place of Gods' truth (Jn 8:44, 32). God's truth liberates us from the lies of the enemy and creates for us the freedom to live as purposed.

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## OUT FROM THE CAVE A Character Study from the Life of Elijah Pt 7

Considering Elijah's flight from Ahab and Jezebel we have discussed at length, the potential contributing factors of his fear, anxiety, darkness and depression (1 Kings 19:1-18). Now we move on to considering some of God's response and instruction for Him as measures to get him out of the cave and back to a life of purpose.

As a disclaimer, let's again agree that these are truths that help us face our own bouts of fear, anxiety, darkness and depression from a spiritual faith perspective. These do not exclude or negate the possible need for professional counseling, therapy, medication and other resources.

Looking at Elijah's initial flight we find a simple but profound response from God that can make an extreme difference in our levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. It's the idea that we need to maintain a sense of focus on replenishing our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.

In this current age we call it self-care. More apt for us as believers would be the term soul-care. Soul-care encompasses the total being, not just the mental and physical. Our truth is that we are tri-partite beings. Because we are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26; 2 Cor 13:14; Mt 28:19), there is also the trinity of man (1 Thess 5:23; Heb 4:12).

While often used interchangeably, the primary distinction between soul and spirit is that the soul is the animate life, or the seat of the senses, desires, affections, and appetites. The spirit is that which connects, or refuses to connect, to God. Our spirits relate to His Spirit, either in acceptance (Rom 8:16) or resistance (Eph 2:4-5).

When it comes to our well-being and the interconnectedness of them, neither of the three, spirit, soul, or body, can be neglected. As we consider God's initial intervention in Elijah's flight response to Jezebel's threat, we discover that God initiates the encounter by addressing his physical well-being (1 Kgs 19:1-8).

Firstly, we see that Elijah takes time to rest, which may have been prompted by God or may have been a response to the exhaustion of a days travel. Either way, we know that rest is essential to our well-being and is a necessary component of soul-care. If God decided to rest we certainly need to (Gen 2:2-3; Ex 20:8).

While rest is necessary, so is our nourishment a part of our recuperation from the daily stressors, turmoil, and bouts with anxiety and depression. Notice the first thing that God does is sends an angel, on two occasions to awake him from his sleep and to ensure that he ate and drank. Once for recuperation and once for preparation (Vs. 5,7).

Intentional rest and nourishment for recovery and renewal may sound selfish, self-indulgent, but is essential to the stewardship of our body, soul, and spirit. If you want to win against depression, you have to let God fill you again and that means taking care of the vessel He's given us.

When we are wandering through the darkness of depression our physical needs are, perhaps, more important than we realize. Our body's requirements may be more spiritual than we think, particularly if this is what God decides to address first. Sleep and food are both gifts or graces from God (Ps 104:10-15; 127:2).

When your body feels rested and nourished it increases the odds that your mind will be as well. When you are physically fatigued, mentally drained, and emotionally exhausted, you've set yourself up for depression. When we are physically tired and malnourished, we're also spiritually vulnerable.

Elijah just traveled many miles over months of time, and instead of scolding him, God provided for his most immediate and basic needs. Restoring his health was God's starting point. What if we treated our basic needs like God did Elijah's; going to bed early enough to get ample rest, drinking enough water to be hydrated, intentionally eating *healthy* foods?

Fear, stress, and anxiety are not only taxing mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, they also have a huge impact on our bodies physically. Before God addressed his spiritual needs, he attended to his physical needs and strengthened by those he was able to at least continue that part of the journey.

If you're battling darkness and depression, first things first. Do what you can to meet your body's basic physical and emotional needs. Doctors and psychologists are finding that even the smallest changes in diets, sleep habits, exercise, relationships, hobbies, etc. can help us feel empowered and have lasting impacts.

Something as simple as physical activity may help bump up the production of your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters, called endorphins. Exercise in almost any form can act as a stress reliever, increase self-confidence, improve your mood, help you relax, and lower symptoms of mild depression and anxiety.

Minimal amounts of activity and exercise can also improve your sleep, which is often disrupted by stress, depression, and anxiety. All of these can be beneficial and can ease your stress levels and give you a sense of command over your body and your life (1 Cor 6:20, 9:24-27).

Most of us know that we can't neglect ourselves physically and expect to stay grounded, let alone make up for the stress, exhaustion and busyness that plagues our lives. Creating healthy habits around diet, rest, and physical activity can help proactively prepare us for the eventuality of troubles and tragedies that would attempt to drive us cave-ward.

We need the same things. Before we can continue on our path of healing and restoration, we need to be strengthened by sleep, nourishment, and exercise. Once those needs have been met, we'll be ready to resume our journey toward God's next divine destination.

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## OUT FROM THE CAVE A Character Study from the Life of Elijah Pt 8

One of the most vital components of battling bouts of anxiety, depression, and darkness is maintaining and/or restoring our physical well-being. Self-care, as a means to spiritual well-being, begins by meeting some of the simpler necessities of life like nutrition, adequate rest, and physical activity.

It is toward “soul-care”, as believers, that we journey in order to avoid prolonged experiences with anxiety, depression, and darkness. Created in the image of God as tri-partite beings, Soul-care encompasses the total being, not just the mental and physical but also, and maybe more importantly the spiritual.

One of the keys to a healthy spirituality that keeps us out of the cave is allowing our faith in God and His word to determine our life’s perspective. A change of perspective will, without a doubt, transform our view of everything we see, face, and experience (Ps 3:3, 24:7-10; Lk 21:28).

Our true position, seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6), is the perspective from which we need to view what we face here below. Looking around at our circumstances will always keep us from looking up to God; the God of and over our circumstances.

This is the trap that Elijah fell into, losing his ability to see clearly because he was looking around at his circumstances rather than up to God (1 Kgs 19:1-18). Considering that God met Elijah’s needs for rest and nourishment first, we can surmise that getting physically healthy is only the beginning of the journey to overcoming depression.

The next step is where our ultimate help comes from; an encounter with God. This is where every one of us is every day and in every state; in need of a God encounter. Notice that the first thing God does is invites Elijah to express his feelings (1 Kgs 19:9-10). He wants us to open up and freely share what we are feeling.

It’s when we aren’t in touch with our feelings or willing to share them with God and with others that our emotions contribute to our depression and darkness. There are at least six emotions Elijah experienced and expressed and God knew he couldn’t come out from the cave until he aired his feelings.

**Fear:** (Vs. 3) “Elijah was afraid”. **Desperation:** (Vs. 4) “I’ve had enough”. **Low self-esteem:** (Vs. 4) “I’m no better than my ancestors”. **Anger:** (Vs. 10) “I’ve been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty”. **Loneliness:** (Vs. 10) “I am the only one left”. **Worry/Anxiety:** (Vs.10) “They’re trying to kill me”.

These are a recipe for depression and any one of them can be overwhelming, but mixed and melded together they become and even more potent poison. Suppressing or harboring any of these emotions or feelings will only turn inward on us and eat away at our joy from the inside out.

Elijah’s honest expression and letting go of His feelings created space for Him to receive what God wanted to give him, a one-on-one encounter (Vs 11-13). God’s intent was not to interact with Elijah through the powerful displays that he was accustomed to, but to allow him to experience God on a much more personal level.



The gentle whisper that caught Elijah's attention is a reminder that God usually speaks to us in stillness and quietness, privately and personally (Ps 46:10). The difference between Mt Carmel and Mt Horeb was that Mt Carmel was spectacular for everyone to see. In his depression, Mt Horeb was for spectacular for Elijah personally.

It was this intimate whisper that initiated Elijah's process of coming Out From the Cave; putting his cloak over his face and standing at the entrance. His response symbolizes him stepping forward to the threshold of a new beginning. He wasn't fully out, but it was a necessary step and stage in the process.

Rarely will we experience instant healing from depression, but a fresh awareness of God's presence and perspective will almost always get us moving. Knowing Him personally is the greatest anti-depressant available in our spiritual battle for health and wholeness (Prov 18:10; Neh 8:10; Gal 5:22).

When we are in our darkest moments, God moves, because we have nowhere else to turn and have likely exhausted our own attempts to solve our problems (Ps 34:18). It's in these times that He has our undivided attention, and in our desperation we long to hear something from Him, even a whisper.

If we want a life-changing depression-alleviating encounter with God, we have to come clean and express our truths about our feelings, emotions, mistakes, sins, and secrets. We must be honest with God and with ourselves, and deal with our contributing factors if we want to encounter Him in a transformative way.

This is how we fight the good fight and push through the darkness: First, by being truthful. It's the truth that sets us free (Jn 8:32). Second, by worshipping. God inhabits our worship. Worship helps us focus on God and not ourselves, gives Him the glory He deserves despite our feelings, and helps us pursue Him as He pursues us (Jn 4:32).

Embracing the truthfulness of who we are helps us seek and embrace the truthfulness of who He is and who He says we are in Him (Heb 11:6). This as truth is the perspective changing transformation that we need. We should only live our lives according to the truth of who God says we are and nothing less.

Worship, literally, changes everything; our perspective, our mood, our desires, our choices (Ps 16:11; Is 61:3). Why? Because worship is the way in which we encounter God. Sometimes we have to fight to worship, stretching our faith to the breaking point, seeking him despite the darkness of our cave.

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## OUT FROM THE CAVE A Character Study from the Life of Elijah Pt 9

Whether it's Elijah, yourself, or anyone else, coming *Out From the Cave* is going to require an encounter with God. It's in these encounters that we thank God for His initiation (Jn 6:44). It is truly God who initiates our salvation, and perpetually initiates our being drawn in our daily living.

This encounter between God and Elijah in the cave was God's way of meeting Elijah where he was, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Knowing the value of releasing pent up feelings or emotions, God asks Elijah the vital question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" to allow him to be honest with himself.

This type of expression is a pressure relief valve and is essential in our ability to come to terms with our perspective on where we are, and possibly why we are there. It is also in this place and space that God purposes to change our perspective from a limited contextual view to a spiritually purposeful view (2 Cor 12:1-7).

This divine encounter in the cave and his expressing his emotional state (fear desperation, low self-esteem, anger, loneliness, worry), he is summonsed to exit the cave. This initial encounter helps him realize that, by God's presence, exiting the cave is more than just a possibility.

God sent messengers from nature- fire, wind, and an earthquake to remind Elijah that God is still God, and despite his experience with Jezebel he is not to be ruled by despair. Upon hearing the still small voice, though we don't know what was said, Elijah moves to the mouth of the cave and the same conversation is rehearsed.

Again, God asks what are you doing here Elijah? It's possible that God asks this question a second time to get Elijah to consider something else; his identity. One of the major movements necessary to come *Out From the Cave* is stepping into our true identity: who God says we are (Ps 139:1-18).

In the midst of battling depression and darkness we do *sometimes* have a greater capacity for losing sight of our true identity; a divinely purposed identity. The cure for a faulty identity is getting closer to God through prayer and His word so that we see a clearer image of who He is and in Him who we are (2 Cor 3:18).

The problem for so many is that life and circumstance has caused us to look in the wrong mirrors. We may see vaguely familiar images, but they are still distorted. When we catch a divine glimpse of who we really are, we should realize that we are made for more than depressive states and bouts with darkness. We are made for immortality (Jn 11:25-26).

One of the keys to getting out of depression is knowing who('s) you are. More specifically our purpose, assignment in life, reason for living. Instead of focusing on what happened or how we got in the cave, we need to begin focusing on who the God of the universe created us to be.

Often times we *feel* based upon the narrative we *believe* about ourselves, no matter how far off base these feelings and beliefs are. Our emotions follow the story we tell about ourselves, and we make choices and develop default behavior patterns that fit the false narratives. We need to change the narrative.

To alleviate or eliminate the impact of traumas and the stories we tell ourselves about it, we must look in the right mirror. And the right mirror is what God says about us. The mirrors of family, culture, environment, or words spoken will always, like funhouse mirrors, show distorted images.

The only One qualified to define you is the One who created you. What you believe about yourself is foundational and is only found in connection with your creator. When you want to see clearly who God intended you to be, you have to step away from the false mirrors you've been relying on for affirmation.

Mirrors of mistakes and wrong choices can make us falsely believe that "I am what I did". This action based identity leaves us imprisoned to irrevocable experiences. Understanding that what we have done does not define who we are can help us quickly get back to living our true identity (2 Sm 12:16-23).

Mirrors of social pressure make us believe that "I am who *they* say I am". This happens when we let other "*people*" define us and put labels on us. This mirror provides the worst, most inaccurate reflection of who we are because, in our search for a sense of identity, it fluctuates based on who's saying what in the moment.

Mirrors of inferiority make us falsely believe that "I am not enough". It is the creation of unrealistic expectations for ourselves and how our lives should be that can cause deep depression. When it comes to who we are in God, we are never inadequate (Rom 8:37, 12:2-3). David never thought he was *just* a boy and the disciples never thought they were *just* fisherman.

To see ourselves accurately we need to look to a new mirror, and to find out who we are supposed to be we need to as the One who made us. He holds the key to catching a glimpse of our true identity. His truth, His word, and His Spirit will reveal to us who we really are; forgiven, healed, and called.

We are perpetually forgiven by God and we need to learn to forgive ourselves even for our false narratives, self-images, and identities (1 Jn 1:9; 2 Cor 5:17). We are healed, in Christ, from all the things that have made us "dis-eased" mentally, emotionally, and spiritually (Is 53:5). We are called by God and created on purpose for a purpose (Jer 29:11; Eph 2:10)

The mere fact that God came to Elijah where he was is a sign that God still had plan and purpose for his life and it was beyond this moment in this cave of darkness and depression(1 Kgs 19:15). Viktor Frankl says, "Most people have enough to live by but nothing to live for; they have the means but no meaning". For this reason coming *Out From the Cave* means stepping into a new assignment.

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## OUT FROM THE CAVE A Character Study from the Life of Elijah Pt 9

*"Most people have enough to live by but nothing to live for; they have the means but no meaning"*  
**-Viktor Frankl**

One of the challenges of time in the cave of anxiety, depression and darkness is that we often allow our experience to alter or misalign our reality. Not so much our contextual reality, but more our personal reality and often times the perspective on either of the two can impact the other.

Who I think I am, can impact my context. What I think my context is, can impact who I think I am. Darkness can cause us to fail to properly self-identify. Self-identity has to be aligned with God-identity. Rediscovering and embracing our true and divine identity, who God says we are is at the core of stepping from the cave darkness into the light of God's presence.

Because all of these are integral steps for coming out of the cave, we need not just nourishment, a God encounter, and the right mirrors. We need to renew our purpose. Walking in our true purpose gives our lives meaning and the two, together, drive us toward a life outside of the caves of our experience.

Unfortunately, when we lack meaning in life, meandering through it, we try to dull the pain of meaninglessness by pursuing pleasure. Pleasure and its fleeting sense of satisfaction only leaves us void, craving, disappointed and if we're not careful anxious, depressed, and defeated.

The goal is to never let the pain of meaninglessness consume us. The opposite of depression isn't happiness; it's meaning and purpose. The goal is to live for something (someone) bigger and more meaningful that sustains us *and* drives us even in our grief, depression, and anxiety.

Remember, we left Elijah at the mouth of the cave on Mt Horeb being restored by rest and nourishment, experiencing God's power and might, and hearing the Lord's whisper. He responds by covering his face and stepping forward. Then the conversation with God that began with his response to God's question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kgs 19:14).

God's response to Elijah's expression of his grievances was not to comment on his complaints, but instead to remind him of his calling by giving him a new assignment (Vs 15-18). This command to go back to Beersheba, which literally means "the well of the oath" was to help Elijah renew his commitment to God.

If depression leads us to veering from the path of divine purpose and meaning, then we will need to be re-aligned and re-purposed. God's desire for every discouraged and depressed person is to get us back into a life of influence, meaning, and usefulness for the Kingdom. Terminal failure and disqualification is not how God works.

There is never a time that we are not without a God-given purpose, which is why He wants to heal and restore us to get us back in the game. When we lose sight of our purpose, when we lack a clear vision of who we are and what we are called to do, we, like King David, make bad choices (2 Sam 11).

Restoration includes new dreams, a renewed sense of purposeful living. In the OT, the Hebrew word used for “dream” is akin to the word that means to be “healthy” or “restored”. Dreams of the future will make us feel healthier, more content, and able to enjoy the journey of each day. Being distracted by circumstances, overwhelming emotions and false assumptions sink us into the dark.

Again, perspective matters. It matters where we fix our eyes (2 Cor 4:16-18). Focusing on ourselves compounds the intensity of our depression. Focusing on our God-given purpose, helps us discover the strength and energy we need to step forward. Even our pain can be repurposed (2 Cor 1:3-7).

The key to getting out of our cave of depression is to connect with something bigger and more compelling than what we’re going through. We all need meaning and a sense of making a difference in our world. Listen for God’s voice, so you can hear your next assignment and step forward.

This is where we find Elijah, finally stepping out of the cave of darkness and depression into the light of God’s presence and the realigning of his purpose (19:15-18). The discovery for Elijah is that God was not finished with him just because he had a difficult season of wrestling with his theology, his health, and his emotions.

The return to Beersheba was also for the restoration of renewal of Elijah’s God purposed life. The return was to continue in the service of ministry to others; anointing three of God’s chosen. It was also for re-purposing the nature of relationships for Elijah as he was called to anoint Elisha, a prophet whom he would mentor and prepare to take his place.

When we are struggling, God makes a difference in us and then uses us to make a difference in the lives of others; often times in unusual and unexpected ways. More often than not, our ministry comes from our pain, as God uses what we’ve been through to help someone else find their way.

*Ultimately, your pain is either a jail that imprisons you or a school that empowers you. -Hodges*

God’s final strategy for Elijah’s coming *Out From The Cave* of depression and into the next stages of life was to give him healthy relationships and a community (Vs. 18). Once he obeyed God’s command and accepted God’s new mission, he left his cave and (to our knowledge) never experienced depression again.

Staying out of the cave of depression and helping others do the same requires trust in God and healthy relationships with others. As you restore balance, experience healing, pursue your God-give dreams, and build relationships, rely on the Lord’s power to protect, sustain and empower you.

Remember that He is our loving Father who created us for His special purposes He wants us to be fulfilled and our lives to be meaningful (Eph 2:10).

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## OUT FROM THE CAVE: Character Study from the Life of Elijah Pt 11

The Prophet Elijah had just experienced a great victory over the prophets of Baal, but it only took a threat from a wicked queen to send running him for his life into the wilderness. It was there, while hiding out in a dark cave that fear and anxiety drove him into a state of depression and despair.

Exploring this story about Elijah reveals that everyone is susceptible to depression. Even as we walk closely with God, we can still stumble and get lost in the wilderness of tangled emotions. On the contrary we have learned that we don't have to stay there. We serve a God who, by His grace meets us in the darkness and commands us to come out.

One of the keys to avoiding these wilderness and cave experiences is building, and maintaining a strong "emotional house" that can withstand the unexpected storms of life (Mt 7:24-27). Another way to avoid these experiences is to come to the understanding that we aren't created to do life alone.

We all want to be needed and we all want to be *known*. We all have experiences, gifts, and abilities that can bless others in countless ways, which in turn blesses us. Christ-centered relationships provide the final and critical ingredient that God offers us to get (stay) out of our cave (1 Kgs 19:19-21).

Because relationships help provide the best assurance against cave-ins the enemy attacks our relationships relentlessly; especially our covenant relationships. If he can destroy our connections with others, he cuts a crucial lifeline God designed to help keep us healthy, whole and out of the cave of depression.

We have to regularly take inventory of our closest and most influential relationships as a way to take a significant step out of the cave of depression and into the light of God's presence (Prov 13:20). Any relationship that is harmful and pulls you away from God and your purpose in Him can in no way be healthy.

Experiencing true community with true companions is critical for our emotional health and safety as you move out from your cave season. It's in this community that we find the help we need and we become the help others need. It is in this community where the reciprocity of covenant relationships becomes strength for living (Prov 27:17).

This is the heart of what our lives are really all about; loving others (Mk 12:31). This is also why the enemy works so hard to drive us towards ruptured relationships and caves of depression. *Stepping* out of the cave and into the light we can see clearly who God made us to be and what He designed us to do.

Staying out of the cave of depression and helping others move out of theirs requires trust in God and healthy relationships with others. As you restore balance, experience healing, pursue your God-given dreams and purpose, and build relationships rely on the Lord's power to sustain you through it all (Phil 4:4-9 NIV).

### ***Discussion Session Questions***

1. Reading the narrative of Elijah's cave experience (1 Kgs 19) what can you identify with most about his descent into depression? What experience(s) led to your ability to do so?
2. Which of the issues contributing to depression have you experienced (The imbalance of a poor theology, the comparison curse, the rumination of negative self-talk, self-imposed isolation)? How did they compound what you were thinking and feeling and make you more depressed?
3. What do you need to change or adjust based upon your needs right now? Possible needs in the future? How will you attempt to make these changes or adjustments?
4. What truths, principles, or practices will you take with you now that this study has concluded? Have you already changed anything since starting and completing these lesson?
5. What relationships do you have that need to be renounced? Renegotiated? Reconciled? Renewed? If these are covenant relationships or divinely purposed relationships, what can you do to realign them with the direction God is taking you?
6. What have you learned from Elijah's experience about yourself or others that can help you, and or help you help them with darkness and depression? What can you do to help prevent others from being driven into the wilderness and cave experiences?
7. Who is your Elisha and what advice would you give them as they are picking up the mantle of life, ministry, relationships, etc.?