

What Causes and Cures Spiritual Depression?

- All right, welcome back to the study of Elijah. Today's gonna be a little bit different. Thus far, I've been kind of wearing the prophet hat. So every week is demons and governments and culture and head-on collisions and kind of, you know, Halloween meets Rob Zombie on Mardi Gras kind of situation. Where we find ourselves today, I'm gonna take the prophet hat off, I'm gonna put the pastor hat on. This is really about one man's deep struggle and how he takes it to the Lord. And so for us, in our time together, we're gonna be in 1 Kings 19. If you've got a Bible, find that place. And the question we're gonna answer is, what causes and cures spiritual depression? And the timing of this message is really interesting because this is Mental Health Awareness Month. And this is the first weekend of Mental Health Awareness Month. And I've been teaching God's word now for almost 30 years, or around 30 years altogether. And what I find is when you open the Bible, it always works and fits. I didn't know that we'd be hitting this time in the calendar. But really, what we're seeing today is an increase in mental health, suicidal ideation, depression, especially among younger generations and particularly young women. That being said, the timing of this word is really perfect. And what I wanna say is this, in the Bible, you're gonna get an honest look at human life. And usually when they write a biography about someone, it's only their wins, not their losses, it's their ups, not their downs, it's their good days, not their bad days. And what we find when we open the Bible, because it's the most honest book ever written, it shows us the reality of humanity and human history. And it gives us the most honest glimpse into the best and worst days of people's lives. And what you're gonna see today with this man of God, Elijah, you're gonna see him on perhaps his worst day, his lowest day, his darkest day. To be sure, he's lived an incredible life. Up until this point, the man of God has seen God show up in power over and over and over, but on this day, he feels very powerless. He doesn't feel strong, he feels weak. He doesn't feel confident, he feels afraid. He doesn't feel secure, he feels insecure. He doesn't feel whole, he feels broken. And you need to know that sometimes the godliest people have seasons and bouts with discouragement, depression, and even despair. I'll give you some examples in the Bible. There's a guy named Jeremiah. He writes about lamenting and he's a weeping prophet. So every day for him is emotional, it's difficult, he struggles. And there's a day where he's having a real wrestling with God in Jeremiah 24, and they ask him, "Why are you so frustrated?" He said, quote, "Because God did not kill me in the womb." That's a dark day. In addition, he asked this question, "Why did I come out of the womb to see toil and sorrow and spend my days in shame?" He's like, "I just wish I wasn't born." In addition, Job, another great man of God, but he goes through a lot, sees his children die and his health taken and his reputation destroyed, and his body attacked by Satan. And in Job 3:1 it says that "Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth." He had a negative anniversary on his birthday. We have positive anniversaries where something good happened. A negative anniversary is where we remember something tragic. And he says, my birthday is not a positive memory, it's a negative anniversary. In addition, there's entire books of the Bible like Lamentations, and it's just grieving and weeping. The longest book of the Old Testament, or in fact the entire Bible, is the Book of Psalms. And it's a series of songs and prayers and journal entries from people who are undergoing kind of the highs and lows of life. And they're processing emotionally and openly and publicly with the Lord. And the largest category is called Lament, Psalms of Lament. It's people who are broken and they're hurting

and they're trying to bring their pain to their God, trying to make sense of the life that they are living. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul speaks of this same thing. One translation says in 2 Corinthians 1:8, Paul says, we were quote, "Completely overwhelmed." We can all identify with this. Completely overwhelmed. He goes on to say, "Beyond our strength." I can't go anymore, I don't have it. I can't just fight through it, "So that we even despaired of life." When when our head hit the pillow, we were just hoping that we wouldn't have to wake up the next day. And sometimes what happens is, you're told that godly people don't struggle, godly people don't suffer. That godly people are always happy, they're never sad, as if every day was Christmas. And the truth is, sometimes it's the godliest people who have the darkest days. In history, Martin Luther, one of the great Protestant reformers, he battled mightily with depression. John Wesley, the Founder of Methodism, that Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians would follow in his wake, he struggled mightily with depression. One of my personal favorites, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a great old Baptist preacher in London, he is very well known for his open public struggles with depression, including physical struggles. And he died at an early age, after a difficult life, in his fifties. Martin Luther said he was, quote, "Frequently on the borders of despair." If you go south of here just a little bit, you'll be right on the border of America and Mexico. Luther said, "Where I lived was on the border between despair and hope, and I was just always trying to live in hope, but I always found myself just living on the precipice of despair." Charles Spurgeon said he, quote, "Battled a causeless depression." I've read his biography as well as autobiographies, and sometimes there's a cause/effect between the sadness that you're feeling and the suffering that you're experiencing. And he says sometimes it's causeless, there's no cause or effect. That means it may be spiritual or physical or even chemical. He goes on to say, "It is not to be reasoned with. You might as well fight with the mist as with this shapeless, indefinable, yet all beclouding hopelessness." And let me say this, that when you are struggling or hurting or suffering, when you're sad, when you're having your dark day, sometimes religious people are the worst, because what they do, they weaponize the word of God. They will quote the word of God and use it to beat you when you're already feeling beaten up and beaten down. They'll say things like, "Philippians says rejoice in the Lord always. This would include always, so rejoice." Maybe you've heard this one. "God works out all things for the good of those who love him. So it's gonna be great, just get over it. That was in the past." You're like, "That was this morning." "Yeah, but it's in the past. You need to move on." And so they'll misquote and weaponize the word of God. And some years ago, I'll never forget, I was a young pastor and there was a young woman, she miscarried twins. And I got to go visit her and pray for her. And she was not doing well. Just physically, hormonally, chemically, her body was just very out of sorts. Emotionally, she was devastated. She was very much looking forward to being a mom and holding these beautiful babies. And as she was laying there and she was physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally suffering at every level, her mother walked in and immediately started using the word of God to abuse her. Literally just like, "Hey, you're a Christian. You need to be a better witness. You shouldn't be so upset, the babies are in a better place." Just all of these sort of Christian truisms. And then started quoting some of those same verses that I just gave to you. And this gal looked at her mom and she said, "Mom, just give me a break. I'm not doing good today and I just need a break." And her mom looked at me and she said, "I can't believe my daughter doesn't believe the word of God. She won't even accept the word of God."

And I looked at her, I said, "You're abusing her with the word of God. You're weaponizing the word of God." She said, "What, you don't believe the Bible?" I was like, "Well, actually, I'm a professional. Like I, I teach the Bible for a living. Yeah, I believe the Bible." But what I told her was, I said, "When you go to the doctor, they'll diagnose your problem and then prescribe you something." And I said, "The word of God is like that. You can't just be handing out verses. First, you need to describe the problem and then the verse needs to fit the problem." I said, "The problem is, you only know a few verses and you use them for everything. You're not prescribing the right verses." I said, "Ecclesiastes said, 'A sad face is good for the heart.' In addition, it says in Psalms that there are times when we're laying down in the valley of the shadow of death. That's where your daughter's at today. The Bible says that we should weep with those who weep. She's weeping right now." I said, "If we're gonna quote the Bible, I'm all for it. Let's just quote the right verses at the right time for the right person in the right circumstances." And some of you have been told, Christians are happy, joyful, cheerful. And if you're not, you're not a good Christian. Let me say this, if Jesus isn't always smiling, it's okay to have some difficult days. So here's what I want to do. I wanna look at some of the emotional life of Jesus. And I wanna say, if Jesus, he is God, but if he's perfect and he lives the perfect life, that means in addition to him never sinning, it means when he is suffering, he expresses the perfect emotion for that experience. His experiences are manifest in his emotions. There's about 60 different scriptures that talk about Jesus' emotional life in what's called the four Gospels, these are the biographies about his life, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I'm only gonna look at the more troubled, difficult emotions of Jesus. It talks about him rejoicing and being filled with the spirit of joy. But let's just look at these and let's just look at Jesus and say, you know, a Christian should look like Christ, and here's what Christ looked like on some days. Here's Jesus' emotions in Matthew. It says in 26:37-38, he was "sorrowful and troubled." And he says, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death." In 27:46, "Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'My God, my God, why are you forsaken me?'" That's the darkest day in human history. Jesus' emotions in the Gospel of Mark 3:5, different translations will say that he had "anger and was grieved," or "anger and sorrow," or "anger and deeply distressed," or "angrily, deeply saddened." Chapter 7:35 in Mark's Gospel, "He sighed," just a deep breath. How many of you have been there? It's just like, there's not even words, it's just, it's just the soul expressing pain. That's a sigh. "He sighed deeply," and he had a "deep sigh." In 8:12, "He sighed deeply in his spirit." That sigh came from his soul. In addition, Chapter 14:33-34, he was "greatly distressed and troubled," then he said, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death." He's not suicidal, but he doesn't know how he can continue forward. If you love the Lord, you've been there. Maybe you are there. You're like, "I'm not suicidal. I just don't know how I can keep going." It says as well, "Jesus," 15:34, "cried with a loud voice, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" Jesus' emotional life in Luke 12:50, "Great is my distress." He asks, "What constraint am I under?" and "How distressed am I?" And then he says, "I'm under a heavy burden." How many of you have been there? You're like, "I can't carry this much longer." It says in Chapter 19:41, this is the shortest verse in the Bible, "He wept," or "Jesus wept." Jesus wept. In addition, in 22:44, it says He was "in agony," "in anguish," "in such anguish of spirit." And then lastly, in John's Gospel 11:33 says, he was "deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled." He was "angry in his spirit and deeply moved." He "groaned in the spirit and was troubled." And "a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply

troubled." Some of you have been told that those are not Christian emotions. And I would say those are Christ's emotions. It's not that the Bible has good and bad emotions. It has emotions that you control versus emotions that control you. But when something is difficult and you're feeling it, if it's a negative experience, you're gonna have a negative emotion. If it's a positive experience, you're gonna have a positive emotion. And if you have a positive reaction to a negative emotion, you're not dealing with reality, you're not a healthy person. In addition, it says Chapter 11:38, He was "deeply moved," "angry in himself again," "deeply moved within," "again groaning in himself." He says this in Chapter 12:27, "Now is my soul troubled." How many of you, you're troubled at the soul level? I had a friend of mine, they were going through a very difficult season. They said, "I feel like my soul has a migraine." They said, "Everything just hurts and it's intensified." It says in 13:21, he was "troubled in his spirit" and "deeply troubled." Isaiah told us that when Jesus would come, he would be, quote, "A man of sorrows." Man of sorrows. Now that being said, Jesus has moments of incredible joy and moments of incredible despair. There are moments in Jesus' life where he is celebrating, and there are other times that he is weeping. There are days that he is standing, triumphant in victory, and there are days that he is kneeling, sensing defeat. That brings me to the story of Elijah. And Jesus is the greater Elijah, and he fulfills the ministry and calling of Elijah. We spent some months getting to know Elijah. And if you're new, you can get caught up in the study guide at realfaith.com and everything I just shared with you is in there. But for those of you who haven't been with us, let's just look at some of the highs of his life. God spoke to him and he heard it and he obeyed. He prayed and it didn't rain for three and a half years, and then he prayed and it rained. That's amazing. In addition, he went to a widow's house and God multiplied her flour and oil, miraculously, to sustain her life, and then her son died. And so Elijah prayed over him, and the boy raised from the dead. It's the first resurrection in the scriptures, foreshadowing the resurrection of not just the widow's son, but God's son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He was on the run for his life, most hunted, hated, wanted man in Israel and God kept sending food to him, sometimes delivered by a raven, probably with a DoorDash logo, but he got delivered food. In addition, then, he has this showdown we looked at just a few weeks ago on Mount Carmel, a high place that was dedicated to the demon god, Baal. He said, let's take two bulls, which symbolize the demon god, Baal, your false prophets call down fire from heaven, I'll pray and call down fire from heaven. No fire came down from the demons, but fire came down from the Lord, consumed the sacrifice. And then Elijah slaughtered all the prophets of God. He has seen God show up in ways and on days that you and I can't even fathom or imagine. And then the rain comes and he outruns a horse. You would think that this guy would never have a bad day. I mean, he kind of comes off, if you're just honest, kinda like a superhero. You think about it, like there's an E on his chest for Elijah, man, cape flying in the wind. Like this guy, you know, he eats nails for breakfast and you can't scare him. He just seems like he's that guy. And what you're gonna see today is his humanity on full display. Are you ready? That was the introduction. Here we go. 1 Kings 19:1-8. We're gonna look at Elijah as a case study in the causes and cures of spiritual depression. "Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done." So to catch you up on the story if you're new, ruling and reigning in the nation of Israel was a demonic king named Ahab, demonic queen named Jezebel. They hated God and God's people and God's word. And Elijah was sent by God to oppose them. So there is this very intense collision between Elijah, the servant of

God, and Ahab and Jezebel, the servants of Satan. What had just happened on Mount Carmel, the real God defeated the demon gods and the false prophets were all slaughtered. Ahab is a passive spirit. We've studied that Jezebel is a controlling spirit. Ahab comes home, "Honey, how did it go?" "Not so good. Our demon gods lost and they slaughtered all your employees." Now, Ahab's passive, so he's gonna live with that. Jezebel's controlling, she's not. She's going to now attack Elijah. "And how he had killed all the prophets with the sword." Elijah's a tough guy. "Then Jezebel sent a message to Elijah saying, 'So may the gods,'" and that's an ancient word for demons. In addition to the Holy Spirit, there are holy spirits, we'd call them angels and unholy spirits, we'd call them demons. This woman, Jezebel, is demonic to her core. She comes from generations of worship of Baal. Her father was a high priest to the demon Goddess Asherah. And she literally, here, does what Judas Iscariot would do some years later, she makes a deal with the devil. She says, "I told Satan, if you're not dead in 24 hours, he can do whatever he wants to me." She makes a deal with the devil. "'So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them, unless I slit your throat by this time tomorrow.'" She now has all of the available resources of the nation and the demonic realm all focused on one guy, Elijah, who's all by himself. And what she's saying is, "Your throat will be slit within 24 hours, I promise you." Now there's a massive bounty. He is a well-known public figure. He has just defeated Satan and demons and the prophets of Baal. He is now running for his life. Then he was what? He was afraid. He was afraid, we'll talk about that. But he was afraid. And it's amazing. You can call fire down from heaven and still be afraid the next day. You can see God show up and then have a fear that he will never show up again. "And he arose and he ran for his life." He's running for his life. After everything God has done, he's scared. "And he came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and he left his servant there." Up until this point, there was a quiet, humble servant there was alongside of Elijah. He was only mentioned once previously. And now Elijah leaves him behind. "I'm gonna go it alone." "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness." So he's already run for his life, he gets to the woods and he goes deep into the woods. We've established that he's a Tishbite. He's from this sort of rural, rugged remote part of Israel. He lives outside, he hunts, he fishes. He's very independent. He's the kind of guy like we've established that show, "Alone," he would've been the winner every season. For him, living outside off the land with nothing but your own skill was not something that he did on the weekends, it was his lifestyle. So he goes to where he knows, he goes deep into the wilderness. "And came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked," so now he's gonna pray to God. "He asked God that he might die." He's like, "God, can I just die today? Can I please just go home?" Let me say this, I don't think he's suicidal. He doesn't want to take his life, but he's lived so much of life that he just wants to go home. How many of you, not a raising of hands, but you're like, "I get that." Like "Hey, if you could have anything today, what would you want?" "To leave." I would like either Jesus come back, or I go home. Either way, I don't wanna be here anymore. Like, I've lived a long life. I've been through enough. I believe in Jesus, I believe in heaven. I would like to go. I would like to go. "Saying, 'It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life, for I'm no better than my fathers.'" And he lay down." He literally, he's done. "And he slept under a broom tree." You know you're tired when you run for your life, go into the woods and then sleep on the ground. You're just done. "And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, 'Arise and eat.'" 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 he laid down again." You ever been so worn out, you're like, "I'll get up to eat and then I'm going back to bed." That's where he's at. "And the angel of the Lord," it's probably Jesus, we'll talk about that, "Came to him a second time and touched him and said, 'Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.' And he arose and ate and drank, and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the Mount of God." So here's what Jesus' half-brother, James, says about this man, Elijah, in Chapter 5:17 of the Book of James, "Elijah was as completely human as we are." I want you to know this. The Bible's not about extraordinary people, but God doing extraordinary things through ordinary people. That's what it's about. And we look at Elijah, you're like, "Man, he's incredible." Well, that's just what it looks like to live a fully surrendered life filled with the Holy Spirit. And he was just as human as we are. And if we were a counselor looking at this scene, we would say that he was triggered and dysregulated. That would be the language today. A trigger is, something triggers you. Here, Jezebel's pronouncement of his death sentence triggers him. He's triggered. Says he was afraid and ran for his life and wanted to die. Your triggered. And he's dysregulated. When you're regulated, you have emotions. When you're dysregulated, your emotions have you. When you're regulated, you can control your emotions. When you're dysregulated, your emotions control you. You know what I'm talking about? How many of you, you should be able to just tell people, like you're dysregulated, you're just not doing good today. Like what you're thinking and feeling and sensing is not in the rational part of the brain, it's in the emotional part of the brain. "I love you, but we gotta wait a little while to get the best version of you back to make decisions." And so here, I was wondering, why did this trigger him and dysregulate him? Because up until this point, had this same death sentence been pronounced on him publicly repeatedly? Yeah. When it didn't rain for three and a half years, they put a bounty on his head. He spent years under a death sentence, the most hated, hunted man in Israel. Why in this moment does it trigger him and dysregulate him? Well, maybe we don't know. But let me share with you something that as I was sitting and I was praying for you today, and I was praying for the sermon, something came to mind. There's this phrase where he says, where he's laying in the woods, he says, "I'm no better than my fathers." And when I first read that line some months ago, preparing, I thought, "He's whining." How many of you, I mean we whine, right? Some of you're like, "It's a part-time job for me, I whine all the time. Sounds like he's whining." Some of the commentators I read said, "He's just whining." He's like, "My dad and my grandpa had a better life than me. Woe is me, I'm not having a good life." And then as I was praying today, let me share something with you that is speculation, but it's for consideration. When he says, "I'm no better than my fathers," what he's saying is, "They're gonna hunt me down and kill me." This could mean that they did that to his father and his grandfather. What he's saying is, here's what he may be saying, "My family's been fighting this battle for generations. I saw my dad up against this government and these demons. I saw my granddad up against this government and these demons. And they were good men and they fought hard and they loved the Lord, but they got killed." We looked in 1 Kings 17 when we started the story that they slaughtered all the prophets and they closed the Bible teaching schools. That's what the government did, 'cause it's always God versus government. We don't know anything about Elijah's family. All it tells us in 1 Kings 17, Elijah was a Tishbite. He came from the Tishbite Region, that's all we know. But I wonder, if he didn't come from multiple generations of godly

family, I wonder if the reason we don't hear about his mom and his dad and his brothers and his sisters is 'cause they were all slaughtered. This may explain why Elijah has no wife and no kids. Once you've seen your family slaughtered, you don't wanna have a family. Especially if you know that you've got a prophetic calling on your life that's going to lead to a lot of conflict. It doesn't really work to run for your life through the wilderness with a stroller. And so what may have triggered him is remembering, or being negatively reminded of the slaughter of his own family. See, there are still places that God's people are being slaughtered for their faith. There's martyrs all over the globe every day. This would make sense why he was triggered and dysregulated. If you've seen your family slaughtered and now they're coming for you, you're thinking, "I'm gonna suffer the same fate as my family. Just another generation losing and dying." If so, if he's remembering those haunting scenes growing up of seeing the murder and execution of his own family, it would make sense that he was triggered and dysregulated. If we had to have a word for Elijah here in our modern day, I'd say this would be a good candidate, burnout. Elijah's burned out. And what happens here, he's burned out physically, emotionally, relationally, mentally and spiritually. This is like an avalanche on your life. It's not like you're strong in one area and weak in another so you can lean into your strengths to overcome your weaknesses. Everything gives way at the same time. Physically, he's burned out. He's lived alone off the land for years. He's been on the run for three and a half years. He keeps moving and he keeps trying to survive. And it says, quote, "He lay down and slept under a broom tree." He's just tired. How many of you have been there? You're just like, "I'm just tired. I love Jesus. I'm just tired. I just can't go anymore. Physically, I'm just done, I've hit my limit." That's where he is. He's just done. There's no more fight in him. Now, just a few days prior, he gave all he had, right? For every action, there's a reaction. For every up, there's a down. In addition, emotionally, he is burned out emotionally. He's just done. There hadn't been rain for three and a half years because of his prayer. Do you know how people felt about him? They hated his guts. Because now, if rain doesn't come, the crops don't grow, the livestock can't flourish and the economy can't survive. Everyone in the nation is looking at Elijah saying, "You're destroying everything for everyone. We need to destroy you." He's hated and despised. Some of you, if one person doesn't like you, you're triggered and dysregulated. Like, "Oh, my gosh!" Okay, now imagine a nation, they all hate you from top to bottom. Emotionally, he's exhausted. Plus, then, he just called down fire from heaven. And he personally slaughtered the prophets of Baal, personally slaughtered. Do you know what it takes emotionally to end a human life? I mean, these are not just stories, these are realities lived by the people of God. So he is emotionally burned out, he's done. In addition, relationally, he's burned out. Up until this point, we've only seen one anonymous servant at his side. What does he do here with the servant? Sends him away and he goes into the wilderness alone. He's isolated now. He's all alone. He's burned out relationally. There's no one that he trusts. There's no one that he wants to invite in. There's no one that he thinks is going to be for him and with him and help him. This is very dark. And he is rejecting the one person who is with him and for him. In addition, mentally, he's burned out. He's like, "Okay, I'm gonna pray. God, can I just die today?" Can we just admit that's a very dark place? So you can come alongside Elijah at that moment and say, "Look at all that God's done. He answers your prayers, he sends down fire from heaven. He's always fed you. Elijah, you're a winner." He's like, "Not today. Today, mentally, I'm just not doing good." Some of you have been here,

some of you are here. Some of you know someone who's there right now. And spiritually, he's burned out. Spiritually, he's oppressed. Ahab and Jezebel, they're empowered by demons, Baal and Asherah are named in the book. And so what happens here, Elijah, the man of God, he's not possessed internally, he's oppressed externally. He's still filled with the Holy Spirit and he loves the Lord, but there's this oppression that comes over him. As soon as Jezebel makes a deal with the demonic, then the demonic is deployed to oppress Elijah. This is where, I love counselors and doctors. I believe in integrative care. I believe that we should take everything from the sciences and social sciences as well as the scripture, general and special revelation, I think we should learn from everything. But let me say this, if you don't understand the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of the demonic, you will not understand how to truly help everyone as best as you possibly could. Because here it's spiritual, right? If they would've looked at Elijah and said, "Well, let's look at your blood pressure and let's check your heart rate. Well, physically you seem to be doing pretty good. Well, tell us about your..." "Well, I love God and God loves me. And God's always been there for me." Okay, so what's what's going on if it's not your body, and it's not your heart? It's demonic, it's an oppression. And I just feel inclined to say this, some of you have really felt this. Some of you, there are times you're like, "I don't know what is happening. I don't feel like myself and I'm not doing good." And it says here, he was afraid. And the Bible says that God has not given us a spirit of fear. With fear comes the demonic spirit of fear. With his fear has come a spirit of fear. And now he's oppressed. He just, he feels overwhelmed. Some of you've felt that way. You're like, "I don't know why I feel like this. I'm not myself today, I'm not doing so good. This is a very dark day for me." That's oppression. That's what he's experiencing. We love you and I love you and I'll be honest with you, I experience this a lot. I have for 27 years. Not only do people show up to church, so do demons. They don't check their kids in, but they come. I guess some of them do. You know, now that I think about it, I've met those people. Yeah, for sure they do. Yeah, you could tell. They park their broom outside and check their kids in. You know, so that's how they travel. And they will tell us that preaching for an hour is the equivalent of eight hours of work. It's why, statistically, most pastors resign on Monday. Like, "I'm done. I can't do that anymore." And what I love about the Elijah story, and I want to be honest with you, and I want you to be honest, Elijah's honest. Can we just say, thank you, Lord, that we get to be honest. We get to be honest, he's honest. He's not like, "I'm doing fine. God works out all things." He doesn't start quoting the short list of weaponized verses. He's like, "I'm not doing good. I just want to go to sleep and never wake up. That's where I'm at today." And how do we know that Elijah's honest? I was thinking about this. There was only one person there with Elijah, that was Jesus. We'll talk about that in a moment. When it says, "An angel of the Lord," angel means messenger, that usually refers to an angel. But when it says, "The angel of the Lord," that usually refers, in the Old Testament, to Jesus. So it says, "An angel of the Lord came," and then it says, "The angel of the Lord came to him again." Here's what happens. Elijah's in the middle of the woods all by himself, and Jesus is like, "I gotta go help that guy." And I love that Elijah's honest, because the only way we would know about this is if Elijah told us. There's nobody else there. The only way that we know this day in Elijah's life, he walked out of the woods and said, "Let me tell you about the worst day of my life." So let me say this, we need to be honest. We don't need to fake and pretend that we're good and doing good. Some days are bad and we're doing bad. Pastor Jimmy Evans, one of my

pastors, he told me, he told me when we were getting ready to plant the church. He was like, "You sure you want to go back into ministry?" I said, "Not at all. Not at all. I'm very sure that I'm not sure." He said, "Because being a leader is like wearing a 200 pound jacket." And if you're a parent, you love your kids, you wear it. Let's say you run a business, you feel that for your employees and for your clients and customers. If you're the head of a school and you've got all these little kids that you're looking after, or whatever the case may be, maybe you're in ministry and you have a flock that you're tending to. When you take on that leadership, he said, "It's like a 200 pound jacket and you never get to take it off." You wake up in the morning, you're wearing it. You sit down to eat breakfast, you're wearing it. You go to work, you wear it. Everybody else leaves their jacket at work, but you gotta wear it home. You wear it to bed. You wake up in the middle of the night and you're like, "Oh, my gosh, I got all these people and things I'm thinking about, worried about and concerned for." Elijah's been carrying this jacket for years. And he finally reaches the point where he just says, "I'm a human being." Let me say this, Elijah's not in sin, he's human. He's just human. It's not a sin to be human. Now humans do sin, but it's not a sin to be human. He's been wearing this 200 pound jacket and what he's telling God is, "I can't carry it anymore. Can I go home now?" And it's not that he doesn't trust the Lord. He trusts the Lord so much, he just wants to be with the Lord. He's not a man who lacks faith. He's like, "Lord, I know heaven is real. I want to go." Seven lessons from Elijah's spiritual depression. Number one, for every ministry, there's anti-ministry. If you've ever done ministry, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Elijah's doing ministry, Ahab and Jezebel, they're doing anti-ministry along. The Holy Spirit's doing ministry, Satan and the demons, they're doing anti-ministry. This is why some people come into church and they're like, "I don't know what's wrong. There's so much conflict and criticism and people don't like things." Like, welcome to a God ordained ministry. The only thing that doesn't get resistance is something that's already surrendered to Satan and he doesn't need to get in the way. There's gonna be anti-ministry. It's a peaceful time now, but I'm telling you, wartime eventually comes, just remember this. Number two, the stronger the anointing, the deeper the suffering. Elijah has a deep anointing, so he has incredible suffering. The person with the deepest anointing was Jesus and he had the greatest suffering. He suffered and died on the cross. And his suffering started the night before where he is up all night, filled with anxiety and sweating like drops of blood and telling the Father, "I don't know if I can do this." That's Jesus. Some of you have a deep anointing, which means you have great suffering. And some of you, you're wondering, why do I need to suffer? Well, maybe because there's a great anointing in ministry for you. There was an old pastor named Tozer. He said, "Those who God will use mightily, he must wound deeply." Number three, there's a big difference between privacy and secrecy. What I love about this, Elijah goes into the woods all by himself, and Jesus shows up and he doesn't bring Twitter. I love that. He doesn't bring the blogosphere, he doesn't bring the news media, he doesn't bring the critics and the enemies. What he says is, "Elijah's not doing good. I'm just gonna meet with him privately." Secrecy is where you're doing something evil and you don't wanna get caught. Privacy is, it's not your business. It's not your business. There's a dear friend of mine, he works with very high level pastors and leaders. He's kind of a confidant. I call him the Wartime Conciliary, but anyways, if you've watched "The Godfather." So anyways, he gets brought in to give consult on difficult days. And because he works with a lot of high, well-known, high profile leaders, people come up to him and they're like,

"Tell me about so and so. What really happened? Why did they get divorced? What really went down?" And I love this about my friend. He always says this. He says, "That's not my news to tell." He said, "If you want to know, ask them. And if they want you to know, they'll tell you. But if I tell you, it's gossip." So here, Elijah is really struggling, but it's his news to tell. It's nobody else's news to tell. I'm sure there are people speculating, "Where's Elijah? Is he hiding? Is he guilty? Was he arrested?" I'm sure there was all kinds of speculation. The truth is, he's not doing good. Number four, the leader who calls the shots will take the shots. Elijah's been calling the shots and he's taking the shots. This is why a lot of people don't want to be the leader. We learned earlier, there was a man of God named Obadiah in 1 Kings 18. And Elijah's like, "I'm all alone." And Obadiah's like, "I got a hundred other prophets, two groups of 50 in a cave, they're each hiding in their cave." And I keep reading the story. And if I was Elijah, I'd be like, "Hey, can one of those guys give me a day off?" You know when those guys show up? Never. I thought they were prophets. Or were they mime prophets? They never say anything. They don't say a word. And it may be because they're like, "We love the Lord. But Elijah, I mean, he can call the shots, take the shots. We'll pray for him in the cave." There's a lot of people who just wanna live in the cave. They don't want to go public with their faith, and they don't want to call the shots and take the shots. That's Elijah. And number five, there's a difference between self-care and being selfish. What we're seeing here is self-care, like Elijah is broken, he's not doing good, he's burned out. Now, this has gotten really abused in our culture because there are some people who are lazy and selfish and they will use difficulty to give them a lifetime of retirement at the government's expense. I was talking to a buddy mine, he runs a business and he said he's having the hardest time hiring young workers. They start with, "Well, how many days off do I get? And what's my mental health days and my vacation?" He said, one guy came in with a list of dates that he already had booked for travel for the next two years and said, "I'm not available to work on these days." It's like, "Well, why don't you show up before we negotiate your break?" Like, I mean, it's crazy. But there are certain people who wanna say, "Oh, you know, I really need to make sure that I don't burn out." Let me say, like, "You're, you're like, so you and burnout, you're like." See, I'm now out of the shot, right? But you're this close to burnout, right? Some of you, there's a whole generation of people like, "I don't wanna burn out." Like, "Oh, don't worry about it. Your mom will tuck you in. You still live with her, you're not gonna burn out. You're not gonna burn out. You'll be fine." You'll be fine. Putting your shoes on is not a trigger, like, you know? "Oh my gosh, I need to go." "You're gonna be okay." But again, there are some people that push and work and drive and strive to where they're going to hurt themselves. And so what we don't want, is those people who are using and abusing this concept of burnout to take it away from those for whom it's truly needed. Elijah has been at war, as far as we can tell, at least three and a half years, but probably his entire life. He's not being selfish, it's self-care. He can't go anymore. Number six, God treats some people better than they treat themselves. Elijah has not taken very good care of himself. How do I know? He's done. And God comes and God takes better care of him. Some of you are good at giving grace to others, but not to yourself. Some of you, you need a day off, you need a break, you need to go to sleep, you need to turn your phone off. You're not doing so good. But then for yourself, you don't give yourself the same grace that you will give others. God treats Elijah better than Elijah treats Elijah. And lastly, if Elijah needed time with Jesus, we all need time with Jesus. He needed time with Jesus. It's like,

"Elijah, turn your phone off. No more meetings. No, just silence and solitude, get with me." I talked to you about the emotional life of Jesus. In the roughly 60 passages in the four Gospels that it mentioned his emotional life, there's one emotion that's expressed in the Bible about Jesus more than any other emotion. It's compassion. Compassion. Jesus looks at Elijah and he understands. See, the Bible says we don't have a high priest. Jesus, who's then to sympathize with us in our weakness. Jesus is like, you're hungry? I've been hungry. You're tired? I've been tired. Your body is broken and you're not healthy? I know what that feels like. Your friends have abandoned and betrayed you. I've been there. Your own family has denied you or disowned you. I understand that. Jesus has compassion and he has compassion for Elijah and he has compassion for you. So let's talk about God's recovery plan for Elijah. And if you are in a place like Elijah, you need a recovery plan. Like, "Okay, well if I'm not doing so good, what do I need to do to bring forth a healthy and better version of me?" And if you're struggling with severe depression, prolonged seasons like this or suicidal ideation, you need professional help. You need somebody to look at your body. How are you doing physically? They need to look at your soul. Where are you at spiritually? They need to look at your mind. What are you thinking? They need to look at your heart. What are you feeling? And treat all of you, because God made and he loves all of you. And let me say this as well, I was thinking about it this week in Staff Bible Study. There are two prophets that I want to compare and contrast, Elijah and Jonah. And if you know the stories, God told them both, "Go to this place, minister to these people." And they both ran the opposite direction, sat alone under a tree and told God they wanted to die. So apparently, if you're a prophet, this is how it goes. Now what happens is, that God rebukes Jonah and he restores Elijah. Isn't that interesting? He shows up to Jonah and he is like, "Why are you so upset?" And basically saying, you don't wanna be here 'cause you're a racist, you don't love these people, you hate them, and you just want me to nuke them and I'm not gonna do that. Go love them and serve them. A little wooden spoon to the prophet, go, obey your father. Now to Elijah, he doesn't rebuke him, he restores him. Here's why. Jonah's bad, Elijah's broken. And sometimes broken people do the same things as bad people. Man looks at the outward, God looks at the heart. God looks at the heart of Jonah and says, "That's bad." God looks at the heart of Elijah and says, "You're broken." This is where we can't just look at what people are thinking, feeling, saying, and doing. We need to look deeper to the level of the soul. Are they bad, or are they broken? Let me ask you this, is Elijah bad, or is he broken? He's broken. He's like, "God, I can't do this anymore." See, Jonah didn't obey. He was bad. Elijah's been obeying and it broke him. He can't do it anymore. In your own life, when you're sinning and struggling and suffering, you gotta ask yourself, "Is it 'cause I'm bad, or because I'm broken?" For Elijah, he's a good man. He's a man of God. He's just broken. He's not feeling good. So here's God's tenfold plan, I'll hit it quickly. First, sleep, he lay down and slept. When you're not doing good, go to bed. Go to bed. Jesus took a nap. Be like, Jesus, take a nap. I didn't sleep enough for years. I just kept working and grinding and going until I broke. You either get a break, or you break. Those are your options. I'm now 52. I believe in a good mattress. I do. If you're married and cheap, and you're like, "We don't have money for that," well, we do. We do. We do. We can walk to work after we sleep on a comfortable mattress. We can afford this. He slept. I now sleep nine to 10 hours a night. I'll tell you, this week, I finished the book on Elijah, 63,000 words, on Monday. I was so emotionally exhausted, the next day, I took a nap for an hour. I got

up and I took another nap for another hour. I wish I could tell you that I was tougher and stronger than I am. But instead, I'll tell you that I'm good at napping. I just was emotionally, spiritually exhausted. Like, I just wrote a whole book on Elijah. It's gonna take me a few weeks to recover. So you need to sleep. And if you can't sleep, go to your doctor and say, "Okay, how do I get some sleep here?" And then number two, he got a divine touch. It said, "An angel touched him and said to him, 'There are places in your life that you just need to invite the Holy Spirit to touch you.'" "Hey, Holy Spirit, that trauma, I just keep reliving it. I need you to touch that. Holy Spirit, that divorce, that loss, that miscarriage, that betrayal, that humiliation. Holy Spirit, I just need you to, could you please touch that?" Invite the Holy Spirit to touch that and he can heal it. And God speaks to him. And some of you, God has spoken to you or he will speak to you. But lemme say this, some of you, you just need to really deep dive into the word of God. Sometimes the best way to get a word from God is to spend time in the Word of God. So like, "You know what? I really struggle with fear. I need to study the word of God on the spirit of fear." Some of you, "I'm bitter and I can't forgive and move on and I'm just angry and frustrated. I need to study bitterness and forgiveness and I just need to go to the word of God and hear what God would have to say about that." Some of you're like, "I'm not discerning, I just keep trusting people and getting into these damaging relationships." Okay, you probably need to camp in Proverbs and get to know wise, foolish, and evil people and have those categories. Just whatever it is, like, okay, if I keep getting hurt here or broken here, how do I go to the word of God and study that? Maybe I need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and live by his power. Number three, nutrition. God says, "Wake up and eat. Arise and eat." God wakes him up to eat. You need to eat nutritious food. And sometimes what happens when you're burned out, you just go toward energy drinks and caffeine and carbohydrates and sugar and adrenaline. How do I know? I know a guy. And so it's like, you need to figure out for you what's a healthy, nutritious diet that causes you to be physically healthy? Because your body and soul are connected and you're not gonna be doing well if your body is not doing well. And then feasting. It says that God baked him a cake. So let me just camp here, this is very important. We don't have enough Bible teaching on cakes. And how many of you like cake? Amen? Okay. Let me say this, if cake is, for you, one of the four food groups, you are not having a nutritious lifestyle. But when do we eat a cake? At a celebration and a party. Happy birthday. It's our anniversary. You're married, cut the cake. I wonder if Jesus didn't bake him a cake, bring it out and say, "You know what, Elijah? Well done good and faithful servant. How how about we celebrate your faithfulness? You blow out the candles. We'll have some cake." You know, when people have served the Lord faithfully, it's good to honor them and maybe even spoil them. This is perhaps my wife's new favorite life verse. My wife, just so you know, loves cake, loves baked goods, loves them. We're convinced there's cake in heaven, we prayed about it. It's gonna be great. My wife loves baked goods. And how many of you, you don't wanna live an indulgent lifestyle, but every once in a while, a treat or a dessert or after a long hard season, you're like, "You know what? I just need a little small group time with Haagan and Dazs, or Ben and Jerry. We just need a little time together." It's okay to have a treat. Grace really loves, I'll share this, Grace loves cinnamon rolls. And they have to be hot so that the frosting and then the butter on the frosting is melting and they're gooey. If they ever make a men's cologne that smells like a cinnamon roll, I am lathering myself in it. It's gonna be an incredible day for me. It's true. Right, babe? It's true. She's right here.

We're in church. You can't lie. How many of you though, if you had a bad day and Jesus is like, "I'm here with a cake," you'd be like, "It's better." And then hydration, number two, it says he drank another jar of water. How many of you are new to the desert? Let me give you a little pro tip. Stay hydrated. Stay hydrated. Like, if you love your kid, buy them a water flask to hold water. If you get dehydrated, I'm telling you, you're not good. I was flying back from India some years ago doing ministry and I was so tired, I slept on two flights for like 20 hours and didn't drink anything. And I was in the plane and I got off and I was like, whoa. I thought I got something in India. Like, "Did I get the COVID?" Like, "What is going on?" I was not doing good. I went to the doctor, they're like, "You're completely dehydrated." They gave me an IV and I was like, "Oh, my gosh." I didn't know that dehydration would mess with you so severely. So God's like, "More water, son, stay hydrated. You're not doing good." And then divine touch, number two. The angel touched him, that's Jesus. I believe that's Jesus. And what this is, this is the ministry of presence. Sometimes you don't need to talk about it, you just need to touch 'em. Some people don't need talk in that moment, they need touch. But God touched him. Sometimes it's just good to just sit there and say, "You know what? I don't know what to say, but I'm just gonna sit with you on the couch 'cause I love you and we're married and I'm sorry. And let me just put a hand on you and pray over you. Or can we just hold hands and go for a walk? And we don't need to talk." It's just the ministry of presence. And so here, Jesus touches him. And what's interesting, so here, Elijah's on earth and Jesus comes down from heaven. And then spoiler alert, a little bit, Elijah is gonna go up to heaven, and then Jesus is gonna come down to earth. And then Elijah's gonna come down from heaven on the Mount of Transfiguration and meet with Jesus on earth. They keep doing this. And then wellness habits, he ate and drank again. God's saying, "Son, you're eating, you're drinking, you're sleeping. You've been so busy working, you've not had time for wellness. So we need to start some new habits for you." And some of you, you'll be doing good until you break. And then you go back to your bad habits. And then you gotta go back to your good habits. And the point is, how do you get good habits into the long future? And then here's what I love, he worships. He goes to Beersheba, which is where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac and it became a worship center. And he goes to Horeb, which is also in the Bible known as Mount Sinai, or the Mount of God. It's where God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. Both of these were places of worship. Do you know what he's doing? He's going to church. God's like, "You need to go to church. You need to get around the rest of the family. People there are praying and singing. You need that." What we saw when COVID hit, they shut the church down globally. I think that was the spirit of Jezebel. Jezebel closed the churches in Israel and the spirit of Jezebel closed the churches globally. And for Easter, the church wasn't even open in many places across the globe. And so people couldn't get together for worship. They couldn't get together to pray and encourage one another and sing together. And now churches are struggling and declining and dying. And how are people's mental health doing? All time record low. It's like, okay, so if we close the church, people's mental, spiritual... Are you saying that they end up feeling like Elijah when they can't go to church? Yes. So what God says is, "You need a church. You need to go to church." How many of you coming here, you're like, "I'm not the only Christian. Can someone pray for me? Can I pray for you? Can we just sing and get a break from crazy and just be in God's presence? And maybe Jesus come down, meet with us like he did Elijah?" I don't know about you, I don't go to this church because I work here, it's

because I need to be here. I do, I need to be in church. I need to be with God's people. I need that. Pastor Jimmy Evans and I were having lunch in my office recently. He's like, "You need this church." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You need this church. You need these people." He said, "You would not be doing well without these people." He said, "You'd be a very weird, strange man." I don't know about that. But it's true. The best version of me is only with my family and my church family. If I'm not with my family and my church family, I'm not okay. I'll be honest with you. I don't know how Elijah did it without a wife and kids. I don't know how he did it. Like, if I couldn't go home to Grace and the kids, and I'm not saying I'm Elijah or do anything like Elijah, but just doing anything for the Lord without a wife and kids, at least I go home and I know Grace is there. Just to go home alone. At least I can check in on my kids. My grandkids are coming. Elijah's got nobody. He really needs to be in church. And then he gets a servant. You're gonna see in the next scene, God gives him a man named Elisha. He gets one good friend. Sometimes one good spirit-filled friend makes all the difference. You're gonna get to know Elisha, coming up. And then lastly, he gets a sabbath. He gets 40 days and 40 nights off. And here's the thing that you need to know. Sometimes recovery's in an instant, sometimes it's a process. It's like, "Well, couldn't God just touch him and then he's back in the fight?" No, God said forty days, forty nights. God can work in an instant or he can work through a process. With Elijah, he's gonna work through a process. And this 40 days and 40 nights is interesting. That's the number of days that it rained in the days of Noah. That was the number of days that Moses met with God to get the Ten Commandments on the mountain. That's the number of days that the spies were sent in, rather, to investigate the land in Canaan. That's the number of days that Goliath picked a fight with God's people until little shepherd boy took him down. That's the number of days that Jesus was alone in the wilderness, like Elijah fasting and praying and fighting the devil. And after Jesus rose from the dead, it was 40 days and 40 nights that he appeared before he ascended into heaven. Let me just close with this, that Elijah wasn't doing well, but God met him. And I'm praying that if you're not doing well, that God would meet with you today. And I want you to know that Trinity Church is supposed to be a place like the place that God met with Elijah, a healing place. When I first showed up here with my wife and five kids, we were not doing well. And being here with you has been very healing for me and for us. I want to thank you for the way you've treated me and my wife and our kids. I got a text last night from one of my sons. He's like, "Oh, I love our church family so much. It's such a blessing." Lord, thank you. Thank you, Lord. That if you've been a leader in anything, or if you have served in ministry in every way, we've all been where Elijah was, and some of you are where Elijah was. I'm happy to report, best season of my whole life. I'm not living Elijah. That's in my rear view mirror. It's the best season of my whole life. Really love you with all my heart. But I just wanna close with this and I know it could be a bit emotional. In a moment, I'm gonna ask some of you to stand, and I know you don't want to, but you're going to, so that we can pray for you. And just like Jesus put a hand on Elijah, we want to put a hand on you. So I wanna speak to those people. And if you're online, let us know how to pray for you. But if you're in the room, you are a pastor, you are on staff at a church, full or part-time or volunteer, you served in a ministry leadership position. Maybe you were a missionary, or you were their spouse and you saw them go to battle and you went to battle with them, because ministry's the only war where we take our wives and kids to the battle. And some of you were their kids. You saw your mom and dad serve

Jesus, and you saw them go through difficult times. And there were days in your home that felt a lot like this scene in Elijah. If that is you, would you do me the honor of just please, standing. Just please stand. Those ministry leaders, those pastors, those former church staff members and their children, could we just honor these people and thank them? There we go. Thank you. In the military, when people serve, stay standing, they say, "Thank you for your service." And spiritually, you're soldiers, we say "Thank you for your service." And if you have been or are in a season like Elijah, we want you to know that we love you. And this is a place that Jesus wants to encourage you and bless you. We want this to be a place for those who are having some difficult days to get healed up so that God could send them back in the fight as he did Elijah. So I'm gonna invite the band out at this time and we're just gonna meet with God and we're gonna invite Jesus to come down and meet with us. But since, in this scene, Jesus touched Elijah, if you're a believer and you're around these people, can you just lay a hand on them? Let me pray for you. Father God, I pray for, I pray for the ministry leaders, Lord God, that like Elijah, they've been lied about, they've been attacked, they've been used and abused, they've been misunderstood. Holy Spirit, I pray against the spirit of bitterness. I pray for forgiveness and healing and cleansing in Jesus' name. God, I pray for the spouses of those who have served faithfully in ministry. God, they've not been able to tell their side of the story. They've not been able to defend the person that they love the most. They've had to just endure it. And for some, Lord, they're justice people, it's been so hard. And Lord God, they've been where Elijah was. They've seen their spouse and their family and their kids where Elijah was. Lord, for those spouses, starting with my own wife, we honor them in Jesus' name. And Lord, we pray that you would pour out a particular blessing of affection and anointing on them to heal them. Would you touch those places that are broken in Jesus' name? Lord, for those children who grew up in ministry, we can't even imagine, Lord, what it would've been like for Elijah to have kids, what they would've been through, what they would've endured, how they would've been treated. Lord, for those kids that maybe they've got a little church hurt, maybe they've got a few battle scars, maybe they've seen a ministry take the best years and efforts of their mother and father, I pray that they would forgive, that they would bless, that they would be healed. God, I pray for those who have had a season of wandering, or prodigals, that Lord, God, they would know that there's a difference between the church and the Lord and they need to run to the Lord even if they've been hurt by the church. And Lord, we just want to claim that Trinity Church is a healing place. It's a thin place. It's a place for people who are feeling like Elijah to get ministered to as Elijah did. Holy Spirit, we invite you, as the hand of Jesus, to touch these dear people right now. We honor their service. We thank you for their sacrifice. We ask for their healing and recovery, whether that be in an instant or a process. And we look forward to what you have for them next, as you were not done with Elijah, and you're not done with them. And Lord, we pray for other pastors and ministries and churches. Anybody who is serving team Jesus is on our team. Let us bless and not curse. Let us give grace and not law. And let us think and hope and pray and bless the best. And Lord Jesus, as we come to worship right now, we invite you to touch us, and for this to be a healing place and a ministering place and a place where like Elijah, we get the strength that we need for the calling that we have. In Jesus' name, amen.