



Pastor Kyle Mercer
Dealing With Depression

June 22, 2025
Series: Expectant
1 Kings 18:41-19:18

**BIG IDEA - GOD MEETS US IN OUR LOWEST MOMENTS WITH
CARE, GENTLE PRESENCE, AND RENEWED PURPOSE**

Good morning, Two Cities Church. Whether you're here in Winston or you're down in Lexington, I hope it's clear to you that we love kids. Today, across the 9:00, the 11:00, and again at our 5:00 service, we are going to commission about 100 kids. I love what Donovan said. There's nothing that goes against the kingdom of darkness like a bunch of kids raised in godly Christian homes.

A hundred kids, big service...that's all fun, but we wanted you to hear about the individual stories of children in our church, which you just heard with the Smith family. Now, here's the truth. Nothing will challenge and test your faith like the suffering of a child, especially if it's yours. What we got to hear in that story is a couple that's trusting God together.

I love when Aaron said, "Some days I'd be up and she'd be down, and then sometimes she'd be up and I'd be down." Isn't that the church, and isn't that community, and don't we need one another? By the way, one of the things I want to tell you about... As Christians, we have a unique theology to understand disability. We understand that every person, whether rich or poor, old or young, abled or disabled, is equally made in the image of God. Sorry, but Darwinian, atheistic evolution does not have that mentality.

What we want to do is come alongside every person who's made in God's image and help them. What you may not know is that in our church, in our kids' ministry, at our 9:00 and our 11:00 services, we have a sensory room that is designed for kids who have disabilities, and in it we have workers who are specially trained and have a huge heart for kids with disabilities. So, I want to let you know about that, and actually, at

5:00 at night, that room is available for 11-year-olds and up. So, we're trying to come alongside you in that way.

If you'll turn to or type to 1 Kings 18, I want to remind you guys that we gave you a resource when we began this series. This is a reading plan. Here's what we said. You're going to be tired of me saying it. We want you to go to *the* Word of God every day for *a* word from God. If you're going along in this study, you'll know a lot more about Elijah and Elisha.

What has been neat for me is, even over the last few weeks, a couple of you have come up to me and have been like, "Hey, I've been doing the reading, and here's something in the passage that you just taught on that you didn't see, I don't think, but I saw," and I'm like, "Oh, you're right. I wish I would have talked to you before I preached this."

The other thing I want to give you really quickly... It's so small, but this is a bold prayer card. This really came out of an idea... Back when I was in college, we had a "trust God" list. I just want to ask at the beginning of this morning... *What are you trusting God for?* For some of you, the problem with you is not that your prayers are too big; it's that they are itty-bitty. They're too tiny.

I just want to encourage you. I want you to write a big prayer on there. It may be for healing for somebody you know and love or for yourself. It may be for the reconciliation of a relationship. It might be for your "one" to come to faith in Christ. But really, at the center of the Christian faith is a relationship with God with Word and prayer, so we hope this reading plan and this prayer card will help you.

By the way, at the end of the series, like I've told you before, we're going to have a prayer night, and part of it is we're going to be praying for each other for these bold prayer requests that God would show up and show off. Let's pray.

Lord, I pray that right now, as we're going to talk about a lot today in the life of Elijah, that you would do something in people's hearts to where, as Elijah hears the still small voice, the whisper, that you would open up people's hearts today to hear you quietly speak to the deepest parts of their heart.

Lord, I pray for people in here who are going through struggles, maybe depression, discouragement, burnout, or disappointment. That's what Elijah deals with today, and I pray you would meet people. There are people here right now who came because a child was getting dedicated, and they didn't even realize that you had a unique and timely word for them. Would you do that? In Jesus' name, amen.

Now look. We're not the best parents in the world, but one of the things that I think we've done right is when we do family dinner... And this works. This works with your kids at no matter what age they are, but it's great to start this when they're young. Here's what we do at family dinner. Not every night, but a lot of times, we'll ask, "What is a high, and what is a low from your day?"

It's great, because you basically get people to talk about the best things and worst things in their day from a young age. Like, when you say this to your 5-year-old, they're going to be like, "Uh, the worst part? My low is that you won't let us have dessert again." You're like, "Okay. That's fine."

Here's why this is so powerful. If you can get your kids at 5, 7, 8, or 9 years old to talk about the highs and lows of their day, then when your 14-year-old daughter gets called ugly at school, she'll tell you, because you've created the environment where there are highs and lows.

Robby Gallaty, who was here speaking to the men... He has a massive discipleship ministry. He recommends every discipleship group, whether men with men or women with women, always open up with "What is a high, and what is a low from this week?" Why do I bring this up? Because life is full of highs and lows, and today, Elijah is going to go from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows.

See, that's the thing about life. Highs and lows are often right next to each other, and maybe sometimes they're connected. A high is "He asked me out"; a low is "It didn't work out." High is your birthday; low is Tax Day. Sometimes they're close together. Sometimes you're experiencing a low because of a high.

What's interesting is Scottie Scheffler, my favorite golfer... A Bible-believing, Jesus-loving Christian, best golfer in the world. He wins the PGA championship. I saw an interview with him. He said he felt horrible the next day. It wasn't that mentally he wasn't grateful to have won.

He said he didn't realize what that type of pressure was doing to his body for a week...playing every day and the cameras and "Are you going to win the second major?" He said he woke up Monday, and he felt like a train hit him. That's life. Sometimes you have the low right after the high. In Jesus' ministry... If you go to Mark 8 and 9, Jesus goes up to the mountain, and then down into the mess. That's *your* life, and that's *my* life.

So, we're going to pick up on the mountaintop, and we're going to go down to the mess. We're going to start at the high, and we're going to get to the low. The highest of highs is the end of chapter 18. The lowest of lows is chapter 19. That's where we're going today.

Chapter 18, verse 41: ***"And Elijah said to Ahab..."*** Okay. Why is Ahab still alive? Are you asking that question? That's the first question I had when I was reading and studying this week. I'm like, "Why does *he* get to live? All of the false prophets, 450 of them, died, but the worst of the worst gets to live?"

Listen. Let God have his timing in his judgment. What happens with some of us is we think people are getting away with things. They're not getting away with anything. The Bible says those who live in rebellion are only storing up wrath for the day of judgment.

Here's what's unique about you and me in this season of world history. You're able to watch your friends' lives over an extended period of time online. Sometimes you can see people, and it looks like they're having fun. It looks like they're getting away with sin and rebellion. Nobody is getting away with anything. You just have to know that. Keep reading. Ahab gets judged.

What I want you to see here... This is so powerful. Lean in on this one. Verse 41: ***"And Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain.'"*** Okay, here's what Elijah says: "I hear it raining." We all know what that feels like. Right? Have you ever been in a grocery store...? We've been in *here* before, and you start to hear rain. You can just hear it. You go, "Nothing sounds like that. That's rain."

Here's what I want you to get: It hasn't started to rain yet. It's not going to rain for at least a little bit. Elijah has to go up to the mountain. He has to pray. He has to pray a *lot*. His friend has to look and come back and look and come back. They have to be discouraged together, then the cloud has to come, then it has to get dark, and then it needs to rain.

Why am I spending all this time on this? Here's what Elijah can do, and I hope *you* can do this. He can hear what God is about to do. What would it be like if you were like, "You know what...?" That's what it's like to walk in the Spirit. "I know what God is about to do here."

We need to start saying that to other people. "You know what? God is about to work in your marriage. I can hear it start to rain over there. God is at work in your son's life." By the way, this is the spirit of expectation. I can hear what God is doing because I'm close enough to him, and I know his will, and I know his Word. It's the hearing of what hasn't even happened yet that encourages me to pray.

So, here's what we're going to do. Really quickly, we're going to do the high and then the low. We're going to look for a few minutes at Elijah's prayer life. I was praying for you guys this morning, because I don't want to discourage you. I don't want to talk

about Elijah's prayer life and then you feel like, "I'm not getting my prayers answered because I'm not praying hard enough." That's religion and moralism. That's not what I'm saying.

Can I also ask you *this*? How's your prayer life? Can you really say God is not answering your prayers if you haven't at least tried to do the two things Elijah is doing? Now, again, at the end of the day, we don't deserve for God to answer anything. It's all of grace. But I want to show you this. Let me show you what Elijah does.

So, Elijah goes, "You go do you. Eat and drink." Verse 42: ***"So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel."*** He's at the highest of the highs. ***"And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees."*** Now, I don't want to get too graphic, but I want you to know what this posture means. This was the posture, in those days, of a woman giving birth. I will not demonstrate it for you.

Here's what I want you to understand. I don't know if you've ever thought this before. Prayer is, in part, painful. I know. Here I am a man. I cannot talk about childbirth. I'm not allowed. But just for one minute. If there's one thing I think men *can* say... We don't know by experience, although we *have* had a cold. I'm kidding, I'm kidding. I'm kidding! Don't make me get into my seasonal allergies.

We know childbirth is unbelievably painful. Men have never experienced it. I get it. Before the epidural, it was unbelievably painful. When was the last time your prayer life was painful? Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever prayed until you sweat? Have you ever prayed until you fell asleep? And not fell asleep because you were bored but fell asleep because you were so exhausted.

There's something about desperate prayer. It's shown even in his posture. I remember, we were heading back to the college campus. This was when I was a student at Elon University. The final night of this retreat before we headed back to the college campus, the leader said, "Guys, let's pray for the college campus and for our lost friends." I was like, "This is great. Yeah, we've done this before."

Then the leader said, "You know what? Let's do it on our knees." There were fluorescent lights on, and we were in a gymnasium. I'm watching my friends, and we're all getting ready to kneel down. It just did something to my heart when I knelt like that.

Father Nash was Charles Finney's right-hand man. Charles Finney is a controversial character in church history, but there seemed to be a power on his ministry. By Charles Finney's own testimony, he said there was only a power on his ministry while

Father Nash lived. When Father Nash died, the power of his ministry left, according to Charles Finney.

He would send Father Nash (who was a pastor who quit being a pastor to pray full time) into the city he was going to go preach in, and Father Nash would go there a couple of days or a week early and just pray intensely. There's one story of somebody thinking he was in great pain...imagine that type of prayer...that they knocked on the door, and he was on the floor, groaning for the people of that city.

So, there's pain in prayer. It's shown there. Then, look at verse 43. ***"And he said to his servant, 'Go up now, look toward the sea.'"*** I love this. This is a great prayer partnership. "I'm going to pray, and you watch God work." What if we sent our kids off to school that way? "Hey, as you head off to college, I want you to know that your mom and dad are going to be praying for you every day, and I want you to be watching out in the dorm, because God is going to be working."

We send each other off to work...spouses, or whatever. "You know what? As you go out today, I want you to know I'm praying. Here's your job: you watch." Is that not the spirit of expectation? Moms and dads praying at night. "We're going to pray for our kids, and then, can we both watch too? That's the problem. We're not watching. We're praying, but we're not watching."

Then the servant says this. ***"And he went up and looked and said, 'There is nothing.'"*** That can be discouraging. Right? God doesn't always answer all of our prayers in the affirmative immediately. Sometimes it's "Yes," sometimes it's "No," and sometimes it's "Not now."

Look here. ***"And [Elijah] said, 'Go again,' seven times."*** I'm praying for our church to have the "Go again" spirit, but it's so hard. I don't want to beat us up. It's one thing to pray a lot, and it's one thing to pray passionately and painfully. It is a whole other thing...

We just had an all-staff retreat, and a very godly guy was leading our time from Atlanta. He just said at the end, like, an offhanded comment... He said, "Oh, yeah, I love to go down to the prayer room in my basement and just pray." We have workout rooms, TV rooms, dining rooms, and bedrooms. He had a dedicated space where he was like, "I'm going to intercede."

He says, "Go again. Go again. Go again." He says it seven times. Then look at what happens. You know what happens. Verse 44: ***"And at the seventh time he said, 'Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea.'"*** He's saying, "When I look from a distance, it looks like the size of my hand when I put it next to it." ***"And***

he said, 'Go up, say to Ahab, "Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you."'" In other words, Elijah is like, "I got my answer."

Here's another thing: Can you pray passionately and persistently and (here's the key) thank God for the small answers you see? That sounds like the Bible to me. "I'm going to pray massive things, and I thank God for every little cloud I see." Some of you have been praying for your kids' salvation, and you're not even grateful that they like coming to church.

You've been praying to have some amazing marriage, whatever that looks like, and you haven't even realized he's being nicer to you than he used to be. Some of you have been praying to get out of massive debt, and you haven't been thankful for your small raise this year.

Part of what you do in prayer is you open up your eyes and go, "I can hear the sound of rain," and then, when you see a little cloud, you tell everybody. "I cannot believe it. My son read the Bible for the first time in a long time." It's starting to rain. "Ahab, head down the mountain, because soon it's going to be raining, and there are going to be mudslides, and you're not going to be able to get down."

So that's what he says. He said, basically, "It has been answered." Verse 45: ***"And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel."*** He goes home to basically tell Jezebel what happened. ***"And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."***

What a great summary of the ministry of Elijah, which is the hand of God is upon him. What that means is the favor of God, the anointing of God. Depending on what church you're in, what tribe/team/tradition you're from, you may use different words. It's the anointing. It's the favor. It's the power and the presence of God on your life.

When Billy Graham died, I was obsessed, and I read everything and watched everything and looked at every interview. I remember I saw this interview where he was talking about the first time he ever preached. He said, "I got up in some small church, and there were 100 or 150 people in that church. I just made a call for people to come to Jesus, and 15 people came forward."

He said that was the moment where he said, "Lord, maybe you've given me an anointing in this area." Yeah, not everybody can fill stadiums. Not everybody has that powerful call to come to Christ that seems to penetrate the human heart. There was an anointing on Billy's life.

Jon Tyson, who will be at our Heights Conference... I heard him say recently, "I've led big church. I've led small church. I've led Bible-preaching church. I've led prayer church. I've led systems church." He said, "I've led them all." He said, "What I want to lead for the rest of my life is unexplainable church, where things happen here that can't be explained except for the hand and plan of God."

So, that's the end of chapter 18. Now we need to get to the low of chapter 19. Verse 1: **"Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done..."** So, it started to rain, and Jezebel might have thought, "Oh, good. The false prophets won, and Baal sent rain." It's like, "Not exactly."

"Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword." Now, we don't know how he said it. We don't know if he's trying to get her to believe. He has his own issues, but she certainly is not responding favorably. **"Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.'"**

Jezebel, if you haven't gotten it, is the worst of the worst. Have you ever met a woman named Jezebel? You're probably not going to. It's like someone being named Adolf after World War II. You're like, "That name kind of... No more Adolfs." There are a lot of Marys today, a lot of Esthers, a lot of Ruths, a lot of Elizabeths, but not many Jezebels.

She sends a message. Verse 3 is the first time everything changes. He goes from a high to a low, immediately. **"Then [Elijah] was afraid..."** He wasn't afraid of King Ahab. He wasn't afraid of the false prophets. He wasn't afraid of the famine. **"...and he arose and ran for his life..."** He was also running *from* his life. **"...and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah..."**

He's afraid. He's afraid because, for the first time, he has taken his eyes off of God and put them on somebody else. He has taken his eyes off of the message of Scripture. Everything so far has been "The word of God came, and Elijah did. The word of God came, and Elijah did. The word of God came, and Elijah..." And he was confident. This is the first time he's paying attention to somebody else's words.

This happens to us. We get a text message from an ex, and we're afraid. We get an envelope from the IRS, and we're afraid. We get an email from our boss, and we are afraid. We get afraid when these messages come to us. Now, I want you to see what happens here. This is where we're going to spend some time.

"...and [he] left his servant there." The first mistake he makes, outside of being afraid and fleeing, is he leaves Christian community. For some reason... We're all

prone to do it. It's in our human sinful nature. When we're struggling, whether we're suffering or struggling with a sin, our temptation is to leave Christian community. I mean, this is the same servant who worshiped with him, got him the wood, prayed with him, and watched the cloud come, and then he leaves him.

Verse 4: ***"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree."*** Now, a broom tree is so small you can't stand up under it; you have to sit up under it. ***"And he asked that he might die..."*** He says to God, "God, I want to be a non-prophet." (I'm seeing if you're paying attention. That's a pastor dad joke.) ***"And he asked that he might die, saying, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.'"***

As Americans, as twenty-first-century Westerners, we like to psychologize everything. What is he going through? Some people go, "This is classic, textbook burnout," which is one of the two ways that you become ineffective. There's blow up. That's where there are sin issues that haven't been dealt with. You're living a double life. If you're very tired all the time, it might be because you're living a double life. What happens is you can't do that for a long time, and then you blow up. You get caught.

So, that's blowing up. *Burning out* is "I've been so physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually exhausted I didn't even realize it until it was too late." I see this with pastors all the time. You don't even know it happened, and they go sell real estate or go into life insurance, because they're midlife. They're just tired. They don't want to do it anymore. The number one day a pastor resigns is Monday, because he just had some horrible experience at church, and he's like, "I just can't do this anymore."

So, he goes under this tree. Now, is it burnout? Maybe. Is it discouragement? Definitely. Is it depression? Possibly. Is he having suicidal ideation? At some level (I can't get into all of it), maybe. It looks like it. He says, "Lord, kill me." Here are a couple of things I want you to know. Godly people get depressed. They *do*. Sometimes it just comes on people.

King David. You've got "man after God's own heart." You've got "warrior poet." You've got "slayer of the giants." Then he writes psalms like, "God, where are you? How long must I swim in a bed of tears?" You have Martin Luther. If there was one person from all of church history (outside of Jesus, of course) I could have lunch with, it would 100 percent be Martin Luther. He was such a salty figure. He led the Protestant Reformation. Unbelievable guy.

Well, he also struggled, understandably, because he had all of these highs and lows... He struggled with bouts of depression. One time his wife was tired of it. This is a famous true story. She dressed up like she was going to a funeral, and she came down

the steps, or whatever it was, and he said, "Where are you going? Who died?" She said, "Oh, you didn't hear. God is dead." He was like, "Blasphemy!" She said, "Then why are you acting that way?" He said that was one of the things God used to break him out of his depression.

Charles Spurgeon, another hero of mine, prince of preachers, first megachurch pastor in the world, said to his congregation... Could you imagine if I came up and said this? He came to his congregation and said, "Guys, I struggle with depression. I struggle with it so much I hope you don't ever struggle with it as much as I do." And he said (he was a poet), "Under the castle of despair, there are many dungeons. I've visited them all."

I want to try to explain. I'm going to do something I never do, just because I don't ever want this to feel like a lecture up here. I'm going to show you a diagram, because I think it's going to be helpful. This is from the Biblical Counseling Coalition. They talk about the four stages of depression. I think it's very helpful. And they all start with *D*. You know I like that. There's *disappointment*, then *discontentment*, then *despair*, and then *destructive behavior*.

Disappointment is part of being human, living in a sinful world, and the older you get, the more expectations there are in your life that are not met that you thought would be met by now. We all play the numbers game. "Well, by 25..." "Well, by 35..." "Well, by 50..." "I mean, I thought my kids would be... I thought they'd at least have a girlfriend." "I thought we would be able to retire by 65." We have all of these expectations.

Disappointment leads to discontentment. Here's the definition of *discontentment*: "God is not taking care of me." Literally, the definition of *contentment* is "God will take care of me." It works in every situation. What does it mean to be content? I'm ultimately believing God will take care of me.

Then they despair, and despair is where you can see no hope, no way up, no way out, which leads to destructive behavior. The extremes are suicide and homicide. This is why (and I don't recommend this), if you ever read the journal entries of the guys who shot up Columbine, it is so dark, because they stewed in their depression, their hatred for humanity, their resentfulness, and revenge. They just stewed in it and stewed in it and stewed in it.

Here's the question a lot of people ask: "Is my depression spiritual or is it medical?" One of our pastors texted me before this service and said, "I bet in this service right now, between here and Lexington, there are at least 100 people struggling with some type of depression."

You may ask the question, "Is this biological? Is it medical? Is it spiritual?" This is why you need Christian community and be led by the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we can't just say it's all in the brain, like we're just a brain on a stick. "Read this book and meet with this counselor. You won't be depressed anymore." It's like, "I'm not a brain on a stick." And we can't think we're only a body. It's like, "Take this pill and get this surgery, and we'll figure out your chemical imbalances." It's like, "I'm not just a body."

We can't say you're just a soul either. "We'll just pray about it, and don't worry about anything else." We have to say there's sin, there's Satan, and there's the spiritual realm. In fact, sometimes you may need medical help to stabilize yourself so you can get the spiritual and biblical help you need. I've seen that. Anyway, there's no judgment here. What I want to talk about is how God... I think there are some helpful principles on how God helps Elijah deal with his depression. Let's look. Verse 5:

"And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. 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 lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, 'Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.'"

Here's what I want you to understand: physical exhaustion can create spiritual problems. Just on a personal note (I have to know this about myself at this point), every time I travel internationally... This just happened when I was in Greece. It happened when I was in Africa. It happened when I was in China. It happened when I was in Israel. These were all different years.

Every time, for the first two or three days I'm there, I don't want to be there. I just haven't slept well. I'm traveling. I'm like, "What am I doing here?" Then, by the third day, I'm like, "I love it. We need to stay longer." But I just have to know there's something with me and traveling long distances and changing of the hour... I just have to know myself.

Okay, a couple of things. You need to take care of yourself physically. The first thing he does is not give him a sermon but tell him to go to sleep. How are you doing with sleep? I obviously preached this last service, and one of the dads said... I asked the question, "How are you doing with sleep?" He said, "My 11-year-old son said, 'Great.'" Yeah, it's kind of easy when you're young, but as we get older, we struggle to sleep. We struggle to *stay* asleep.

We tend to think sleep is just what we do for a third of our life to help us be unconscious to break up the day. No, it basically improves everything from your memory to your focus to your blood pressure to your heart rate. Listen. If you're not

sleeping enough, it may be an issue of pride, because part of what sleep does is you just go, "I'm not God. I'm fragile, I'm finite, and I actually have to be unconscious a third of my life. I'm going to have to trust God."

God built in a daily and weekly rhythm of rest. The daily is sleep; the weekly is sabbath. Here's the thing: if you don't take a break, you will break. If we could all go visit Novant hospital or Wake Forest hospital, there are people in there who are taking an involuntary sabbath.

They didn't know how to take a voluntary sabbath. They didn't know how to rest. They didn't know how to get enough sleep. They always told their family they couldn't vacation, and now... This happens to people. They take an involuntary (often much longer than they were planning on) sabbatical, sabbath.

So, the first thing is he says, "You need to sleep." It's so simple. The second thing is he says, "You need to eat and drink right." I haven't hit this a lot since we launched it back in September, but when I said, "Some of you need to lose 25 pounds. Some of you need to lose 50 pounds..." So many women were like, "Oh, thank God. Tell him." But there were some people who got offended by that, and that's okay.

Here's the thing. How are you doing? Some of you men are still on the "toes" diet...Cheetos, Tostitos, Doritos. Some of you men are like, "All I need is an elastic waistband, and we're good." You need to get healthy. This is not self-help. You need to get healthy so you can have a sustainable sacrifice over time.

So, there's physical health, but then I want to show you the next thing. Here's what he says. This is verse 8. ***"And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God."*** By the way, he needs to leave and go somewhere else. Seriously. This might be the closest thing we have to... It's hard to give you a text on vacation.

Could you imagine talking to the apostle Paul about vacation? He'd be like, "What is vacation?" But I do think we need to take breaks or else we're going to break, and if you don't know when your next break is, you'll often break. One of the ways our family gets through really difficult seasons and very trying seasons and very busy seasons is going, "Okay. I know when the next break is."

Now, what's interesting is Mount Horeb, if you don't know this, is Mount Sinai. So, here's what people think: he was going to the place where other people met with God. Sometimes, if you're going through a rough time, you need to go, "Where did I last meet with God?"

Some of you need to go to the Billy Graham Library. Just take a half day on a Saturday, or whatever your day is, and go down there. It will so move you to see how God worked through the life and ministry of Billy and his family. It'll wreck you in the best sense of the word.

Sometimes you just need to go somewhere and go, "I need to go where people met with God." For me, I'm still planning at some point soon to go back to Elon University and just walk the campus by myself for, like, half a day. I was a brand-new believer there. It's like, "Oh, that's the dining hall where *this* happened. That's the dorm where *this* happened." We need those moments.

So, he goes there, but then look at what happens. Verse 9: ***"There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'"*** I wonder if God is asking you, "What are you doing here?" and then whatever *your* name is.

By the way, a really powerful thing to do is to take Scripture, put your name in it, and then to take each word of that sentence and emphasize it. "*What* are you doing here? What are *you* doing here? What are you doing *here*?" I wonder if God is saying that to some of you. "What are you doing talking to her at work? You're married. I know she's cute, but what are you doing here?"

"Every time your spouse leaves, you're a little too excited to engage in some type of activity, whether it's something you like to drink or something you like to look at. You're too excited to be alone. What are you doing here?" Saying that to some people. You're with these friends, and you have those moments, like, "What are you doing here with these people? This is not your crew. They are not being a good influence on you."

He comes to him and says, "What are you doing here?" Well, like a lot of us, Elijah defends himself. Verse 10: ***"He said, 'I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.'"***

R.T. Kendall, in his book on Elijah and Elisha... R.T. Kendall is an old saint. I think he's in his 80s or 90s now. He wrote a book on Elijah and Elisha, and he brings up such an interesting point here. He says some people have a *superiority* complex. In other words, they think they're better than others. Then there are other people, maybe just as many, who have an *inferiority* complex. They think they're not as good as others.

He says some people have an *Elijah* complex. An Elijah complex is they think everything depends on them. He says "I" a lot. "God, everybody else is going to hell in

a handbasket, and no one else is faithful. If it weren't for me and what happened on Mount Carmel, if it wasn't for me over *here*, if I wasn't doing *this*, everything would go away."

If you have the mindset that everything depends on you, then when things are going well, you'll be prideful, and when things aren't going well, you'll despair. That's how that works. So, he has to process this conversation with God. Then look at what happens. Verse 11:

"And he said, 'Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.' And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire."

Here's what he's trying to say. Elijah is a spiritual thrill seeker. Elijah is used to seeing God in the big; he needs to begin to see God in the small. I'm telling you, this happens to a lot of people who grew up in youth group and great college ministry and Young Life.

They're like, "Everything needs to be a camp, and we need to go on retreats all the time. When's the next mission trip? Can we do men's night six times a year?" God is in the big, and God is in the small. What will wear you out, what will lead to high and then low and high and then low is to be a spiritual thrill seeker.

So, watch what he does here. This is going to make more sense if you've never gotten the connection here. He's not in the wind. He's not in the earthquake. He's not in the fire. Verse 12: ***"And after the fire the sound of a low whisper."*** This is the best translation of this. You've probably heard it as a *still, small voice*. The best translation is a *low whisper*.

"And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" I love that God comes in a whisper. Think about it. What does a whisper communicate? I think at least two things.

First, you can only whisper to somebody if you're very close to them. I'd never had that thought before. When God comes and whispers, he's basically saying, "I'm right here. I'm closer than you even think I am. I'm so close I can whisper. I'm right next to your ear." On our end, you can only hear a whisper if you're very quiet. It has to be quiet inside you. It has to be quiet outside of you. Even now... I mean, I have a mic on, but if I whisper, you can barely hear it.

Let me just tell you my conviction. God is always speaking; we're not listening. In fact, we're distracted. Our iPhones have become idols, and we can never get it quiet enough. There's always a podcast, a new song, a new show. There's somebody you should call because you have 20 minutes in the car. Don't think. Don't pray. Just call someone and talk to them. By the way, whenever it does get really quiet outside, it gets really loud inside of us, and we're unable to hear God speaking to us.

See, here's what's interesting. I heard a dad... And this is a great dad, so I'll pass this parenting hack on to all of you, because we all need good parenting hacks. He has older kids. He said as your kids get older, like, when they get in the teenage years, and all of the hard conversations come up about dating, about technology...whatever the hard conversations are...

He said one of the things he would always do is he would say, "I want you to go read your Bible, I want you to go pray, and I want you to hear from God on that." That's a game changer. You're having a hard conversation with your 17-year-old daughter about dating and social media.

It's like, "Honey, I love you. What does God's Word say about these things? I want you to go, and I want you to come back and tell me what God says about that to your heart, because we're not a religious family where I just come down from the mountain and tell you everything. You're 17 years old. It's time for you to be led by the Holy Spirit."

One of the best gifts we can give our kids is that we could drop our kids at UNC or App State, or wherever, and they can walk with God because they know how to hear God's voice. It's powerful.

Let me show you how this ends. Verse 14: ***"He said, 'I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.'"*** He basically repeats himself verbatim.

"And the LORD said to him..." By the way, the last thing God tells him to do to deal with his depression is God gives him something to do. ***"And the LORD said to him, 'Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel..."*** In other words, "I have things for you to do."

Hear this in the warmest, most winsome, godliest, most Spirit-filled, most Christ-centered way. Sometimes a depressed person is just having a pity party, and they are

navel gazing. Their world has shrunk to the size of their personal life, and what they need to do is find somebody else who has a great need and start serving them.

He says, **"...and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place."** In other words, "Elijah, it's time for you to start thinking about the next generation. Quit sulking in your own sadness. You have kids. You have grandkids. You need to be a model and an example, and they need you. Get outside of yourself and begin to invest in them." This is the first mention of Elisha.

"And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death." Look at this. The last thing God has to do is correct some wrong thinking. **"Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."**

In other words, part of what God does is he comes to us, and he meets our physical needs. He speaks the Word of God to us. He gives us something to do, but then he corrects the wrong narratives we're believing. If you go back to the story, basically, what Elijah says is, "God, I am faithful to you," and God is like, "You are."

But the whole "I, only I, and all others have forsaken you" is a lie. God is like, "There are 7,000 people who have not bowed the knee to Baal. In fact, you should know that, Elijah, because you met Obadiah. He's one of them. Obadiah told you that he had 100 men in the caves, so you should have known about him."

Here's the thing, guys. The main part of this story takes place in a cave. That's where Elijah is. Elijah is in a cave. It made me think, "Wait a second. There's another cave (if I can use that word elastically) that shows up in the New Testament." We don't call it a *cave*, because it's not up in a mountain; it's on the ground, but I've been there. It's the cave that is the empty tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What you need if you're going to walk out of the cave... Because this whole story is about God coming to Elijah and going, "It's time. You've been in a cave." What a great picture of depression and discouragement that is. It's dark. It's cold. You're all alone. God says, "It's time to come on out."

The first thing he says is, "If you come on out, there are going to be a lot of people to help you, a lot more than you think, but you have to begin to be honest and let us know." In fact, you want to talk about the whisper of God... Do you know who the whisper of God is? Jesus Christ. God says, "I come not how you thought I would come. I come humbly. I come quietly." Isn't that what we celebrate every Christmas with the birth of Jesus Christ?

Guys, I want to end by challenging us to hear God's whisper. I told you I believe God is always speaking. I don't think we're always listening. I heard a pastor tell a story. He said a guy had really messed up with his life...*really* messed up. We all know those stories. You know, his life had fallen apart. I think it ended his marriage...all this other kind of stuff.

He shows up at this guy's church and says, "You know, God just isn't speaking to me. I feel like God is not meeting me where I am in this." The pastor said, "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to go home, and I want you to write down all of the times God spoke to you and warned you about what you were engaging in. The three years you were hiding that... I want you to go home, and I want you to write down every time God spoke to you about it and you just weren't listening."

He said the guy went home, and over three years, he was convinced that God had spoken to him no fewer than 20 times about this issue. It was a sermon he heard. He didn't listen. It was a Bible study he was in. It jumped out. He didn't listen. It was the conviction of a friend talking to him. He didn't listen. It was almost getting caught. It was the conviction of the Holy Spirit. He didn't listen.

If you'll bow your head and close your eyes, I want to give you a chance to hear the whisper of God in some area of your life. You don't need to be depressed to hear God's whisper. You might need especially to hear the whisper of God if you're depressed. I just want to create a moment for us right here for you to say, "God, speak to me. God, you're alive. You're real." This isn't a game. This isn't religion. We have the one true and living God. If we're Christians, we have the Spirit of the living God in us.

Lord, I pray right now you would do the things you did to Elijah to us, that you would speak your low whisper to us. Make us people who are expectant. Make us people who are prayerful, Lord. More than anything, because Christ walked out of the tomb, make us people who are hopeful and not given to despair and destructive behavior. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.