

**First Baptist Church of Augusta**  
**1 Kings 19:1-9**  
***PainFULL: Depression***  
**October 19, 2008**

According to an article posted by PBS:

Bipolar disorder (manic depression) affects approximately 6 million American adults or about 3% of the population in a given year.

Major depression affects approximately 15 million American adults or about 8% of the U.S. population age 18 and older in a given year.

Women experience depression about twice as often as men.

Over their lifetime about 12% of women will have clinical depression.

Approximately 80% of people experiencing depression are not currently receiving any treatment.

80-90% of people who live with a serious mental illness are unemployed.

Approximately 4% of adolescents develop serious depression each year. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for ages 10 to 24.

By the year 2020, depression will be the 2nd most common health problem in the world.

Depression is one of the most treatable illnesses: 80-90% find relief.

Ancient desert monastics referred to depression as the "black dog," which was how Winston Churchill called his melancholy. Abraham Lincoln, as well as his wife, suffered from depression. So did playwright, Tennessee Williams, pop singer, Billy Joel, actor, Harrison Ford, and protestant reformer, Martin Luther. I am not, as a pastor, qualified to give you a 20 minute self-help talk on how to treat depression. Neither is that my role as one of the worship leaders this morning.

Rather, I want for us, as God's children, to acknowledge its pain and impact on all of us, and turn to scripture and find out the good news, when one's life is at times marked as bad news. For this, we will turn to a man named Elijah, whose name means: Yahweh is God. It was a bold name, for one of the Old Testament's boldest and audacious of prophets.

Turn with me in your Bibles to I Kings 17 and we will quickly review the next three chapters...

17:1 – a drought is declared

18:1ff – a challenge to Ahab and the prophets of Baal. V.21b

**I. Sometimes It Doesn't Get Any Better (18:37-39)**

*37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench.*

*39 When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD indeed is God; the LORD indeed is God."*

Elijah, mighty man of God, who has witnessed time and again the victorious hand of the Lord. We look with admiration at a host of people down through the ages, who have embraced success and conquest at every turn. This is Elijah.

**But...**

Even mighty prophets get tired and burned out. Victories are not always what they are cracked up to be. Chap. 17-18 Elijah is presented in power and might but in 19 we see Elijah in weakness and despair – even failure.

Manic depression, which is a bipolar form of depression, is where both highs and lows are experienced. Wayne Oates described his own bout with it...

For Elijah it could not get any better, but there came a time when it could not get any worse.

**II. Sometimes It Couldn't Get Any Worse (19:3-4)**

*3 Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." 5 Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep.*

Elijah felt so bad he wanted to die. Have you ever felt like that? Again, citing from the same source earlier, more than 90% of persons who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental illness, commonly a depressive disorder.

And so, Elijah takes off for forty days running – running from victory, running out of fear and running for his very life. And soon, he found a cave to hide out in – a cave of escape. Visualize, the images unfolding: he pulled the covers over his head and hid from the world, himself, and God. He sought to disengage not just from Jezebel, but life and God.

When victories become hollow, it's easy to give up. Several years ago, I spent a weekend with college students representing the Baptist college students across the state. A campus minister shared this statistic with me that I find sobering: 9 out of 10 Baptists leave the church during college. Have you ever deserted or left your calling, when the disappointments come or the victories become hollow? But, look deeply into the pain and discover God's gentle presence.

### III. Where Do You Go When It Can't Get Any Worse? (19:9-11)

1 Kings 19:9-11

*At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "**What are you doing here, Elijah?**" [10] He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."*

*[11] He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." ...*

Two voices we hear in this place of abandonment: God – *what are you doing here?* Elijah is escaping of course; disengaging. Elijah replies: "*I alone am left.*" I suppose that when depression is at its worst, one feels completely and utterly all alone.

Psalm 102:7 *I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.*

Mother Teresa once remarked that, "in the developing world there is an epidemic of poverty, in the west an epidemic of loneliness."

Elijah's strength, Elijah's success, and Elijah victories left him all alone. I am going to return to this observation in just a moment. Listen to what God says to Elijah: "*What are you doing here?*" I genuinely believe that every life is a called life. Now, embracing one's calling does not inoculate against depression or somehow make us pain free. Moving beyond, however, begins with a sense of calling in one's life.

Bill Self calls this part, the "**get up**" part. You have to get up in order to get going. Whenever a cow was down with milk fever or following calving, it was imperative we get the cow up at all costs. To stay down meant death.

Bill said to me that there are two other points: **Look up** and **Hook up**.

1 Kings 19:12-13

*and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. [13] When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

"Look up" - God is at work where we least expect.

I am part of the younger generation that loves to be entertained and mesmerized. We must be careful, however, not to make our worship little more than a Disney production. **(I have worshipped in bamboo huts in the Philippines and on Sandy beaches in FL. – no production, just God)**

I believe that one reason we have so many defeated Christians milling about is because God is usually in the places we least expect – and we are not looking. But the face of God pursues us, and is present in mysterious and unlikely places and events.

The face of God in the children who pester us and weary us. The face of God is in the bedraggled waitress at *The Waffle House*. The face of God in the senile old ladies at the nursing home, whose thrust bony, arthritic hand is in your direction, jabbering away. The face of God in the confused prostitute working the streets of Broad Street.

Look up and see God in the last places and the least likely faces.

Elijah, however, repeats his claim in 9:14 – *I alone am left*. As the drama of Elijah's pain unfolds, God says to him in verse 18: "*Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.*"

Yes, I admit that it all seems so predictable, but the truth is, we are not in this alone. Why did I cite the above statistics regarding depression? Because, if you are going through depression, or if someone you love is mired down, you can feel as though you are the only one. We are surrounded by the bruised and the battered.

I can think of fewer better images of the church: We gather Sunday after Sunday, beaten and bruised, filled with hurts and doubts, clouded by depression and melancholy and sadness. We are not the perfect body of Christ. But we are not alone.

The voice of God that broke through Elijah's despair is speaking to us too: *What are you doing here?* We are here to be found, when we are tired of fleeing. We are here to be loved, when our enemies have us surrounded. We are here, because this is where you go, when the world no longer makes sense, when the successes become hollow, when the failures become great, when the loneliness becomes stifling, when depression has you choked and all you want to do is die. We are here, because this is God's place and all we have to do is listen and receive.

The Good News is that Jesus, in his brokenness, has come to make us whole. That is the Gospel, and if you have come here this morning confessing your own brokenness, Jesus has come to make you whole. If you have come here this morning, feeling alone as a bird on a rooftop, Jesus has come to surround you with this family.

If you have come here this morning, wondering if there is a way out of your cave, I invite you to listen: not to the displays of power, like fire and earthquakes, but the still, small voice that whispers your name... *beloved of God*.