



Osborne Baptist Church

PURSUING GOD IN ISOLATION • SESSION THREE: ISOLATED FROM HOPE •
1 KINGS 19:1-18 • NO DATE

MAIN POINT

God meets us in the valleys of life, even when all hope seems lost.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When have you had a “mountain top” experience? Where were you? What took place?

Now think about a “valley” experience you’ve had—one in which your situation seemed hopeless. What were the reasons for your despair? What emotions did you feel? How did it affect you physically? How did your circumstances turn out?

Elijah experienced a literal mountain top experience in 1 Kings 18, followed suddenly by a “valley” experience in which he felt tired, depressed, and alone. King Ahab, influenced by his evil wife Jezebel, had led Israel into idolatry. Yet just before the events of chapter 19, the power of God had come upon the prophet Elijah in amazing ways. In a contest with the false prophets of Baal, Elijah demonstrated God’s superiority, resulting in the execution of the false prophets. After a long drought, God sent rain in response to Elijah’s prayers. Finally, Elijah was empowered by God’s Spirit to outrun the king’s chariots. The temptation to feel alone, afraid, depressed, and that his efforts were in vain was overwhelming for Elijah. During this “valley” experience, Elijah chose to run away.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 19:1-8.

Hearing the news that 450 of her prophets had been killed was depressing news for Jezebel. Hearing that Jezebel wanted to kill him was depressing news for Elijah. Contrast the responses of Jezebel and Elijah to the depressing news they each heard.

Have you ever seen two people react differently to the same type of bad news? How do you account for the fact that different people can respond so differently to difficult news and circumstances?

To say there are different ways of responding to bad news is not to say that there are no wrong ways to respond to difficult circumstances. Obviously, in this case, Jezebel wanting to hunt Elijah down and kill him was a wrong response. However, it is important for us to realize that we all respond differently at times to difficulty. Elijah was depressed and ready to give up in this situation, though he had responded differently in previous difficult situations that could have been equally depressing (1 Kings 17-18).

How should the people of God deal with loneliness and depression? What are some of the complexities that accompany this issue?

Have you ever come to a point of loneliness and depression where you have approached God like Elijah? Explain.

Sometimes we may think biblical figures did not experience the same problems we do. Job, Moses, David, Jeremiah, and Elijah were not superhuman. They wrestled with temptation, experienced failure, felt fear, and struggled with depression, as all of us do at times. This shows, however, that God can use ordinary people in wonderful ways, just as He used Elijah.

How did God respond to Elijah? What did He provide?

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 19:9-18.

What did Elijah tell God was the reason he was depressed?

Describe the progression of events as Elijah stood on the mountain before God. Why do you think God wasn't in the wind or the earthquake or the fire?

Why do you think God came in a whisper? What did God ask Elijah?

In verses 11-13, God first revealed His presence to Elijah in His greatness and power, but note that God did not speak from that position. The Lord instead spoke to Elijah in a soft whisper,

showing Himself to be a God who communicates through a still, small voice as well as displays of power.

In verses 15-18, God gave Elijah specific tasks to do. In verses 15-16, God's commands first pointed to judgment. Elijah was to anoint Hazael as king over Aram, Jehu as king of Israel, and Elisha as his own successor. The command in verse 17 indicated the extent of God's judgment—death at the hands of Hazael, death at the hands of Jehu, and death even at the hands of Elisha through His pronouncements of judgment. God was still in control, a fact that reassured Elijah who, once in despair, had felt like nothing was in control anymore. Yet God's words to Elijah reminded Elijah of his call to serve as God's prophet, and they also reminded him of God's sovereign control over the events of Elijah's life. The second part of God's response gave hope. God still had 7,000 people through whom He could work in the future.

How might God use loneliness and depression to speak into our lives? What can we learn about God and ourselves when we are depressed?

How does God use the community of the church to point us to truth in these times? How might He do this even in times of physical isolation? How might you seek to do this for others?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Where do you currently feel alone and without hope? How might you remind yourself that God is still in control?

Why is it significant that God pursued Elijah at a time when Elijah had no desire to pursue God? When has God done this for you in a moment of isolation?

Where do you most need rest and revitalization currently? How will you allow God to meet you where you're at and be your Provider?

PRAYER

Thank God for being present, even when circumstances may tempt you to believe otherwise. Acknowledge that He knows your situation and is working to make everything for your good and His glory. Pray that you would be alert for times when you are physically, mentally, and emotionally spent.

COMMENTARY

| 1 KINGS 19:1-18

19:1. Once King Ahab arrived in Jezreel, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done. He recounted Elijah's proposal, the failure of Baal to respond to the prayers of his prophets, God's incredible display of power, the people's response, and the slaughter of all the prophets of Baal. Jezebel could look outside and see Elijah's prophecy of rain also had come true.

19:2. Hearing Ahab's account, Jezebel viewed Elijah's action as a vicious attack on her god Baal, something she refused to tolerate. She sent a messenger to Elijah, vowing he would die as had the prophets of Baal. As Elijah ran to Jezreel (18:46), he must have been overjoyed at God's great victory over Baal. The people had recognized the Lord as Victor and had acclaimed Him as their God (18:39). Surely Ahab also had been convinced that Baal did not exist and should not be worshiped. Elijah probably expected to return to Jezreel as a victorious prophet. Jezebel's message crushed his joyful celebration.

19:3. Elijah responded to Jezebel's threat with fear and ran for his life. Elijah's flight might have indicated a lack of strength to continue the fight against Baalism and Jezebel or a lack of faith in God's ability to protect him from Jezebel. His victory had turned into defeat.

Many characters in the Bible experienced fear, including Abraham (Gen. 26:7), Jacob (32:11), Joshua (Jos. 8:1), and Peter (Gal. 2:12). We also face fear and sometimes, as Elijah, we seek to escape from frightening situations. When we allow threats to intimidate our faith, we cannot see how God can help us; fear then can overwhelm us.

Elijah traveled south through Israel and Judah and arrived at Beersheba (bee ehr SHEE buh), the southernmost boundary of Judah. There Elijah left his servant, probably the same young man who had reported to Elijah on the status of the gathering rain clouds (1 Kings 18:43-44). Elijah's dismissal of his servant indicated his intention to abandon his prophetic ministry. He would no longer need a servant.

19:4. Alone, Elijah traveled another day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, a small shrub, and sought shelter in its meager shade. Elijah prayed that he might die. He had had enough of standing alone for God. He had grown tired of facing one enemy of God after another. He believed his service for God had been in vain. He, as his ancestors, had failed to lead Israel to a permanent commitment to the Lord. In his depressed state, death seemed the best alternative.

Sometimes we may think biblical figures did not experience the same problems we do. James's statement that Elijah was like us emphasizes Elijah's humanity (Jas. 5:17). It shows, however, that God can use us ordinary people in wonderful ways as he used Elijah. Abraham, Moses,

David, and Elijah were not superhuman. They wrestled with temptation, experienced failure, felt fear, and struggled with depression, even as all of us do at times.

19:5. The past three years in Elijah's life had been trying and exhausting. As a known opponent of Baal, he topped Ahab and Jezebel's list of troublemakers (1 Kings 18:17). Although God had miraculously provided nourishment for him (17:6,15-16), he had watched his people suffer through the drought and still not repent and trust in the Lord. God's impressive victory on Mount Carmel had filled Elijah with joy and confidence, but that evaporated with Jezebel's threat. Within a short time he had journeyed approximately 100 miles, passing beyond the boundary of Judah and into the wilderness.

Physical, mental, and spiritual exhaustion finally caught up with Elijah. He lay down under the shrub's shade and fell asleep. Believers are not immune to exhaustion and depression. Sometimes we exhaust ourselves through Christian service, spending all our time ministering to others without spending enough time with God and at rest. At other times the demands and stresses of life can take their toll. With no physical energy to face or complete tasks, we can despair of ever getting them done. With no mental energy, we cannot think clearly and can become discouraged when we cannot make sound decisions. With no spiritual energy, we lose sight of our divine source of strength.

In Elijah's time of need, God provided for him. God sent an angel who touched Elijah and told him to get up and eat. As God miraculously had cared for Elijah earlier (17:6,15-16), so He did again.

19:6. Elijah roused from his sleep and saw a freshly baked cake of bread and a jar of water. God provided the basic necessities for His servant. Elijah did not awaken to find a multicourse meal, a freshly drawn bath, and a warm bed. Elijah awoke to find hope. In the last few days, Jezebel's threat and the apparent ineffectiveness of his ministry had overwhelmed and depressed him. Now he realized God had not given up on him. The food and water brought hope but did not cure his exhaustion or depression. After eating and drinking, he lay down again.

19:9. God, who had spoken to Moses and Israel at Horeb centuries before, spoke to Elijah. He asked Elijah what he was doing at Horeb. While we might think God spoke to Elijah in a stern, accusing manner, He probably did not. God knew what Elijah had been through. Out of His great compassion, God encouraged Elijah to tell Him exactly what he was thinking. Of course, God knew.

19:10. Elijah held nothing back. He told the Lord he had been very zealous for Him. By contrast, the Israelites had rejected God's covenant, destroyed altars dedicated to the worship of God, and killed God's prophets. Elijah thought he alone remained of all God's prophets, and Jezebel had

turned her full attention to killing him too. As Elijah reflected on his ministry, he could see nothing but a great investment of time and commitment for God that had produced little results.

19:11-13. God first reveals His presence to Elijah in His greatness and power, but He did not speak from that position. The Lord instead spoke to Elijah in a soft whisper, showing Himself to be a God who communicates via a still, small voice as well as powerful displays.

19:15-16. God's commands first pointed to judgment. Elijah was to anoint Hazael as king over Aram, Jehu as king of Israel, and Elisha as his own successor. God was still controlling events.

19:17. This command indicated the extent of God's judgment—death at the hands of Hazael, death at the hands of Jehu, and death even at the hands of Elisha through His pronouncements of judgment.

19:18. The second part of God's response gave hope. God still had 7,000 people through whom He could work in the future.