

HELP!

GOD'S HOPE FOR THE HURTING

Help! I am in Anguish

INTRODUCTION

1 Kings 19:1-18

Anguish is one of those words we don't even like to say. It almost feels like something terrible is coming. Yet we all have or will face periods of anguish in our lives. It can come in many forms, often sneaks up on us, and has several facets. The Bible is full of people who experienced deep suffering—anguish. Often those people are suffering through no fault of their own. Suffering can of course come in physical form, but this week we are going to concentrate on a different aspect—suffering in the form of grief or depression and we will do so through the eyes of one of the greatest Old Testament prophets, Elijah.

Grief and depression are not the same, but they can be related. Grief can lead to depression. Additionally, depression comes in various forms, each of which can be quite serious and are often associated with chemical imbalances in the brain. In these cases, working with a counselor or psychologist, possibly including medication is an important step. We do not hesitate to go to a doctor when we have physical ailments, and we should not do so when we have mental ailments. Village maintains a list of Christian counselors that we have worked with. If you or someone you know is dealing with a more pervasive form of depression as in the examples below, please contact one of the pastors so that we can help you receive the care you need:

- **Major depressive disorder (MDD):** Major depression (clinical depression) has intense or overwhelming symptoms that last longer than two weeks. These symptoms interfere with everyday life.
- **Bipolar depression:** People with bipolar disorder have alternating periods of low mood and extremely high-energy (manic) periods. During the low period, they may have depression symptoms such as feeling sad or hopeless or lacking energy.
- **Perinatal and postpartum depression:** “Perinatal” means around birth. Many people refer to this type as postpartum depression. Perinatal depression can occur during pregnancy and up to one year after having a baby. Symptoms go beyond “the baby blues,” which causes minor sadness, worry or stress.
- **Persistent depressive disorder (PDD):** PDD is also known as dysthymia. Symptoms of PDD are less severe than major depression. But people experience PDD symptoms for two years or longer.
- **Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD):** Premenstrual dysphoric disorder is a severe form of premenstrual disorder (PMS). It affects women in the days or weeks leading up to their menstrual period.
- **Psychotic depression:** People with psychotic depression have severe depressive symptoms and delusions or hallucinations. Delusions are beliefs in things that are not based in reality, while hallucinations involve seeing, hearing, or feeling touched by things that aren't actually there.
- **Seasonal affective disorder (SAD):** Seasonal depression, or seasonal affective disorder, usually starts in late fall and early winter. It often goes away during the spring and summer.¹

¹ <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9290-depression>

Most psychological definitions of depression, like the ones above, don't directly include a very important aspect: spiritual depression. Spiritual depression can have some of the same symptoms of the above issues. It is also the case that some things which start physically (such as a chemical imbalance) can affect us spiritually. The opposite is also true—spiritual issues can affect us physically.

OPEN IT

1. **What book or movie can you think of that accurately showed feelings of suffering—whether grief or depression? What stood out to you about the way that book or movie depicted it?**

READ IT

Primary: 1 Kings 19:1-18

Secondary: Psalm 22, 30, 77, 88; Luke 22:39-44; Matthew 27:45-50

APPLY IT

Elijah is clearly in anguish throughout this passage. Some have identified his suffering as depression. While it is hard for us to definitively say this is the case, an argument can be made that this is true. Elijah was seen as one of the most important prophets in Israel's history, arguably second only to Moses. He appears with Moses in the transfiguration as recorded in Matthew 17, Mark 9 and Luke 9, and Malachi 4:4-5 indicates he will appear before the Day of the Lord. To this day Jewish families reserve a chair for him at every circumcision ritual and a place at the Passover Seder.

2. **Why do you think it is important that this story is included in the Bible?**

3. How do the physical world and the spiritual world interact in this story? What can that tell us about the way our physical lives interact with our spiritual lives?

4. What does the fact that Elijah's period of anguish following such a significant victory tell us about suffering? What does the length of time that Elijah suffered (at least 42 days it seems from vv. 1-9) tell us about either our own suffering or the suffering of those around us?

5. Is Elijah's suffering a sin? What in the story leads you to think the way you do?

Elijah flees in fear and questions his life and ministry, yet there is a clue that he remains anchored to God—he cries out to God in prayer.

6. What does the nature of Elijah's cry to God tell us about prayer? (Think about it both from our human perspective and from God's response. The Psalms can be a great help here; for example, Psalms 22, 30, 77, 88.)

7. How do you expect God to show up in your anguish? If he chooses to show up in small ways, would you be able to hear? Why or why not?

8. How does Elijah's anguish distort his view of what is happening (see especially verses 14-18)?

9. In verses 3-4 Elijah leaves his servant behind and travels on his own. In verse 16 he is told to appoint a successor. Do you think there is a connection? What do you think it says about our need for connection with others?

10. Jesus faced anguish even before his death. When his friend Lazarus died, we know that Jesus was troubled. He wept. In Gethsemane he suffered so greatly that he sweat drops of blood (Luke 22:39-44). The Crucifixion included both physical and spiritual anguish (Matthew 27). How does Jesus' anguish help you to face difficulty?

God appeared to Elijah in his pain. He reoriented Elijah's mistaken view and gave him a new mission. Elijah's life would never be the same, yet God redeemed that anguish. In his book *Turn My Mourning into Dancing*, Henri Nouwen says:

If God is found in our hard times, then all of life, no matter how apparently insignificant or difficult, can open us to God's work among us. To be grateful does not mean prepressing our remembered hurts. But as we come to God with our hurts—honestly, not superficially—something life changing can begin slowly to happen. We discover how God is the One who invites us to healing. We realize that any dance of celebration must weave both the sorrows and the blessings into a joyful step.²

11. How do you think that God's patient interaction with Elijah helped him to heal? How do you think that Elijah's suffering helped him to minister as he moved forward (especially as he trained Elisha)?

12. If you are facing anguish right now, how has this passage helped you to see what you need to put into practice now?

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² Nouwen, Henri. *Turn My Mourning Into Dancing*. (Nashville: Word, 2001), 16.

This study was compiled and questions were written by Kevin O'Brien—www.villagebible.church/smallgroup