



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

emmanuelchurchbillericay

01277 632120 emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org
www.emmanuel-church.info @EmmanuelCM12



Who Cares When ... HG151 I'm Stressed and Depressed?

1 Kings 19:1-18

Home Group Study Notes

24 September 2017 - Revd Annabel Copeland



**PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!**

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.



Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

Word Tennis in teams. Split group in half. Each side take it in turns to name a feeling someone has had this week - the losing team is the team that fails to think of another word!



Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Who Cares When ...
HG151 I'm Stressed and Depressed?

1 Kings 19:1-18

Home Group Sermon

24 September 2017 - Revd Annabel Copeland

Introduction

'I'm fed up' 'It's all got too much' 'I'm exhausted' 'I feel under such pressure-so stressed' 'I feel so lonely' 'I want to give up' 'I feel so depressed'. Do you recognise any of these? These are some of the thoughts of Elijah at the beginning of our reading today. Elijah is a man who is asking the same question we are thinking about today: *Who Cares When I'm Stressed and Depressed?*

Depression is one of the greatest problems in the world today. It has been called the common cold of mental illnesses. Statistics say that 1 in 4 of us will experience depression at some point in life, yet it is rarely spoken about. It would be nice to think we Christians didn't have dark days, days of depression and days of stress, that discouragement came only to those around us. Sadly some Christians still believe this but it just isn't true. As Christians we are as susceptible to the pressures of life as anyone else but we also have a God who cares and is there to help us in these difficult times.

Speaking personally for a moment, as this topic isn't just theory, I too have suffered from depression. Those of you who were here while I was a curate may recall I reached a point of exhaustion and stress resulting in a period of depression requiring some time off work. Now, I say this not to indulge in the modern obsession of therapy by public confession. Far from it. Nor do I say it to present myself as an expert—I am far from that. I say it simply to burst the taboo, those of us who suffer can feel like we aren't allowed to talk about such things but I want to say today that IT IS OK NOT TO BE OK ALL THE TIME

Looking through the Bible at the great leaders we have to conclude that they also had times of despair. The classic study of a depressed person in the Bible is the prophet Elijah, the iron man of the Old Testament. Elijah lived and served during the days of the wicked king Ahab and his sinister queen, Jezebel, who introduced Baal worship into Israel.

Probably the two most significant experiences in his life, Elijah on Mt. Carmel and Elijah fleeing to Horeb, are set side by side in the scripture (1 Kings 18 and 1 Kings 19). 1 Kings 18 records the incredible story of Elijah on Mt. Carmel. Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal, 450 of them, to a theological shoot-out. "I'll call on my God," he says, "you call on Baal, and let's see which one answers with fire from heaven to light our sacrifice. The one that does will be the God of Israel-the true God." In short, Elijah's God wins and the prophets of Baal were killed. Elijah was at the height of success, he was elated. Then in the very next chapter, his fortunes turn and he is delivered a death threat-suddenly he crashes down the roller coaster into depression and despair. Maybe we too have experienced such a roller-coaster- one minute we're up, feeling victorious, full of the joys of spring and then something happens and we crash into the pit of hopelessness, stress and depression.

4. God cares and is there to have a natter. Who listens to you when you need to talk?

What makes someone a good listener?

What helps you talk to God about ALL your feelings?

5. God cares and is there to provide a new perspective. Can you think of a time when your thoughts caused you to have a negative perspective on a situation?

What helped you to change your perspective?

6. God cares and is there to give a new start. How can Emmanuel become a church that enables people to know it's OK not to be OK and help them make a new start?

Personal Health Check

Looking at your own life at present what do you need to do to improve your mental and physical well-being?

Think about something you could change each week, each month and each year.

Could you share these actions with someone in your Home Group and be accountable to each other in achieving them?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read all of 1 Kings 18&19 and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Imagine you had to write a biography about Elijah what would you say about his character?

2. Annabel suggested that Elijah ended up in the pit of depression due to a sense of fear, failure, fatigue and futility. When life becomes tough for you which of these drivers pulls you down, Can you share some examples from your experience - remember to IT'S OK TO NOT BE OK AND SHARE TO BREAK THE TABOO!

3. From the story of Elijah we learnt that God cares and is there to bring healing. Firstly through providing nourishment. What gives you nourishment in life?

When did you last take time out for a rest/retreat to meet with God? What helped it happen and what hindered it from happening?

Elijah's depression wasn't bound up in any one cause. Rather, it stemmed from a number of things. Things that maybe we can identify with too, that may cause us to become depressed or stressed, to feel we are at the bottom of the pit.

The first is a sense fear (1 Kings 19:3). Elijah, frightened by the death threats of Jezebel, runs for his life. Fear is almost always a factor in depression. Many times, like Elijah, we become afraid of failure, of loneliness, of not getting a job completed, of not achieving the grades we want, of not having our marriage go the way we'd like, an anxiety about illness. Fear can cause us to loose sight of reality

Second, a sense of failure (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah held a negative opinion about himself. He felt he was no more successful in changing the hearts of people back to God than the prophets who had gone before him. It's easy to think: "I'm no good. I'm incompetent. God made a mistake when He made me."

Third, a sense of fatigue (1 Kings 19:5). Elijah was emotionally drained and physically exhausted. Mountain tops can leave us that way. He needed rest and relaxation. Depression is always related to or reflected in our physical condition.

Fourth, a sense of futility (1 Kings 19:10). Elijah said, "I am the only one left and now they are out to get me." He feels alone, hopeless and has negative expectations about the future. Elijah is paranoid. He thinks everybody is out to get him.

Have you ever felt like Elijah? Perhaps you are feeling like him right now: afraid, anxious, alone, exhausted, burned-out, and hopeless. Any of these on their own don't necessarily lead to depression but if they build up over time that's when the alarm bells should begin to ring that we're not in a healthy place or maybe you know someone else who is in this place-sometimes when we are depressed we can't see what is happening-our mind is unwell and therefore doesn't think straight - in my case it took the courage of a friend to challenge my behaviour and suggest I might be depressed, she then stood by to help me recover over a period of time-could you be that friend to someone today? Elijah's journey out of depression and stress has some useful lessons for us to learn from for ourselves and to pass on to others. *Overall Elijah discovered that God cares and is there when we hit rock bottom.*

1. God cares and is there to give nourishment.

Elijah had run out of energy-both physical and emotional energy, his resources to cope with life were depleted and need rebuilding. He had been so busy taking care of the needs of the nations that he had neglected his own needs. To become well-nourished again Elijah needed rest, food, and relaxation. He needed to get away from the people and pressures that were getting to him so God provided him first with good food and sleep away from others.

Keeping healthy in general — getting enough of the right kind of food, enough sleep, and sufficient exercise — while no guarantee against depression, may help to prevent it and will certainly keep the body in a better state to deal with it. That's not always easy to do. Thomas Spurgeon, son of Charles H. Spurgeon, once wrote to a friend concerning a period of forced inactivity due to ill health, "I fear I shall find it hard work to do nothing." Many people are that way. They are workaholics. They feel guilty about doing nothing.

But we all need to live balanced lives. We need a rhythm between work and rest. Jesus recognized this and said to His disciples, "Come apart with me and rest awhile." If resting, taking time off was important to Jesus then it needs to be important to us.

We need time to refill the tanks-to replace our physical and emotional energy-if we don't pay attention to this we are likely to become stressed and depressed. Do you have a rhythm of rest and work? What do you need to do to become well-nourished again? -book some time off, recommit to having Sundays a day of rest. *God cares and is there to nourish you in every way if you let him.*

2. God cares and is there to have a natter

Second, Elijah talked through his frustrations. While he sat in a cave feeling sorry for himself, God asked, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Why did God ask Elijah this question? To give him an opportunity to natter, to vent his frustrations. Then God listened non-judgmentally as Elijah poured out his feelings of anger, bitterness and self-pity.

Talking is perhaps the most effective way to rid ourselves of harmful emotions. When we talk it is like pulling the plug out of the bathtub. All sorts of bad feelings are drained from us. Everyone needs someone in whom they can confide without fear of condemnation. Talking to a friend can help to bring life back into perspective and enable us to solve our problems. If we had more listening friends we would need fewer psychiatrists. Find a non-judgmental listener and pour your soul out to them. And as you talk to others, don't forget to talk to God. He, too, will listen non-judgmentally. Elijah practically accused God of unfaithfulness. But God is not defensive. He deals patiently and tenderly with His over-wrought child. God didn't say, "Elijah, prophets shouldn't talk like that." He didn't make him feel guilty for his feelings. He accepted him and listened to him.

For us too we can say what we want to God. He can take it all. He will not be judgmental as you pour out the hurts of life to Him. I've found using the psalms can help with this-they are so real and down to earth-God loves to listen as we natter about however we are feeling. *God cares and is always there to have a natter.* Do you know today that God will listen to you because he cares? Can I encourage you to talk to someone else too-a counsellor for a time for me was a significant help in finding healing. How could you become a better non-judgmental listener to others-allowing it to be OK that they are not OK.

3. God cares and is there to provide a new perspective

The third thing that helped Elijah was to get life back in perspective. He felt that God had forsaken him and that he was the only one left following God. His reasoning went something like this: "Here I am, doing my best to serve the Lord and look what happened. God has forsaken me. I'm the only one left. It's me against the world." Depressed people often feel like that. Part of the illness is that messages in our brain get confused and we lose a right perspective on life. Ultimately all depression can be traced back to some distorted view of life.

In Elijah's case, he had a distorted view of himself and a distorted view of God. He needed to know that God was there and that there were others who had not bowed to Baal. God cared and was there to change Elijah's perspective by speaking to him in a still small voice. It is as if God was saying, "Just because I have not spoken to you as I have to others in days gone by, doesn't mean I am not here." Though God was silent, He was not absent. Though Jezebel was thundering, she was not in control. God was quietly going about His work. We need to remember that too.

Following World War II there was found on the wall of a basement in Germany these words: "I believe in the sun, even when it is not shining. I believe in love, even when I can't feel it. I believe in God, even when He is silent."

Elijah not only needed a new perspective of God, he needed a new perspective of himself. He thought he was the only one who was still faithful to God. God had to remind him that He had seven thousand prophets who had not yet bowed their knee to Baal. God cared and was there to show Elijah a new perspective on life.

Where has your view of yourself or God become distorted? What truths do you need to hear about God to change your perspective on life?

4. God cares and is there to give you a new start

God allowed Elijah to sit in the dark cave of self-pity just so long. Then He told him to get up and get busy again. There was a new king of Israel and a new prophet to be anointed. The time for complaints and self-pity were over; Elijah now needed to get back to work-to make a new start. With us, as with Elijah, when we have received nourishment, had a natter and gained a new perspective, we need to then make a new start.

It can't have been easy for Elijah to go back and it won't be easy for us, but God calls us back even when we aren't fully better. Why? Because it is often through serving others in our weakness that we find further strength and healing. For me, coming back to work in Billericay, after having been off was probably one of the hardest and most emotional moments. Stepping back over the threshold still feeling weak was only achieved with friends walking beside me-the verse that got me through was *-my grace is sufficient for you; my power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9).*

But as I made that new start, even in weakness, and began to serve others, God cared and was there giving me strength and continuing to bring healing and by his grace even using my weakness to help others! Do you need to make a new start today-to discover God's grace is sufficient for you, that his power is made perfect in your weakness? Ask someone to pray for you and walk with you into a new start?

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a prisoner in Russia doing hard labour. One day he felt like giving up. He felt his life could not make a difference. He sat down on a bench knowing that, when he was spotted by a guard he would be ordered back to work, when he failed to respond the guard would bludgeon him to death. As he sat waiting, head down, he felt a presence. slowly he lifted his eyes. Next to him sat an old man with a wrinkled, utterly expressionless face. Hunched over, the old man drew a stick through the sand at Solzhenitsyn's feet deliberately tracing out the sign of the cross. As Solzhenitsyn stared at the rough outline his entire perspective shifted. In that moment, he knew that the hope of all mankind was represented by that simple cross - and through its power anything was possible. Solzhenitsyn slowly got up, picked up his shovel and went back to work - not knowing that his writings on truth and freedom would one day enflame the whole world. So who cares when we suffer stress and depression?

GOD CARES AND IS THERE

He's there to nourish us;

He's there to natter;

He's there to provide a new perspective;

He's there to give a new start.

Emmanuel Text for 2017

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14