

Dear Friend,

At a recent Tuesday night prayer meeting at Times Square Church, I felt led to call forward any young people in the sanctuary who were dealing with self-loathing and a lack of clear purpose for their futures. Forty to fifty came forward—most with tears—and what happened next was amazing. The choir entirely emptied out of the loft to join with them in prayer and we experienced an equal response from the general congregation. Prayer rose up like a roar and many were filled with the Spirit of God!

I was reminded of the scripture in Malachi which foretells a last-days turning of the hearts of the fathers toward their children and the children to their fathers (and mothers). I saw a compassion that could be produced only by the Spirit of Christ. It became so clear that the Lord has not forgotten this generation and He has a plan for every young person we meet.

Please remember to pray for our Bible school, Summit International School of Ministry (summitpa.org). Over 100 young people are presently being God-touched and trained to find their full potential and purpose in our time. What a blessing to hear of the tears of joy and transformations happening there. Take time to check it out. Perhaps you will be the link to some young persons who have yet to discover the depth of Jesus' love for them, and the wonderful journey into which they are called.

With you in Christ,

Pastor Carter Conlon

SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION

by Carter Conlon

"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.' And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!'" (1 Kings 19:1–4).

Many Christians find themselves praying, "God, please just take me home!"

In this passage of Scripture, we have a picture of what could be considered spiritual depression. Although it can be marked by feelings of despair similar to clinical depression or regret over sin or failure, spiritual depression is distinguished by the fact that it happens solely to those who love God. It afflicts those whose hearts are passionate for truth—who long for a return to right living in their society.

Is that the longing of your heart today? Do you find yourself vexed when you read the news and see the vilification

of truth, the exaltation of ungodliness? Referring to the last days, Jesus warned that *"because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold"* (Matthew 24:12). It is evident that lawlessness is abounding in our generation, and as we witness society caving in to ever-increasing evil, it is easy for this love in our hearts to begin to fade—the love of people, the love of our calling in the Body of Christ, and, ultimately, the love of life itself! Eventually, many Christians find themselves praying, "God, please just take me home! If I should die when I am asleep, I am okay with that. I will be with You forever."

If those sentiments sound familiar, I believe you will be encouraged as we look at Elijah's journey and learn from some of his mistakes. For example, we see in our opening passage that when depression hit Elijah, the first thing he did was abandon the one who had been given to him for comfort and strength. *"He arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there"* (1 Kings 19:3).

This is just like the believer in Christ who, as he begins to suffer from depression, stops attending church—thus abandoning those who were sent to comfort him. You see, Elijah's servant was meant to be a companion who would help meet his needs and encourage him on his journey. And so if you begin to suffer from spiritual depression, beware lest you cast off the very people God put in your life

to help and comfort you. Do not isolate yourself and attempt to walk through this valley alone, for that is one of the worst mistakes you can make!

■ INTO THE WILDERNESS

The Scriptures go on to tell us that Elijah *“went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. ‘I have had enough, Lord,’ he said. ‘Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors’”* (1 Kings 19:4, NIV).

In other words, “I had such high expectations of my life—of how I would impact this society. Yet when I thought I would stand and push back the darkness, I discovered that I didn’t have the strength.” And so Elijah plummeted deeper into hopelessness. He began to lose his sense of identity and purpose until he ultimately lost the will to live.

Spiritual depression, if unabated, can lead to isolation from everyone and everything.

If you love God, you will go through this valley. So when it happens, remember that affliction is not unique to you. Many others have had to pass through this valley of the shadow of death—a season when they would rather die than live. The apostle Paul put it this way: *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

More than once I, too, have gone through this valley. I have had darkness fall upon my heart for

reasons I could not explain. I have even had sudden despair hit me in the midst of a season of great victory. One particular year when we had baptized a thousand people in our church, I found myself falling into a hole. Sometimes the depression would last for days, sometimes longer. Every pastor who walks with God goes through this; nobody is exempt from it!

The Bible goes on to tell us that Elijah *“lay down under the bush and fell asleep”* (1 Kings 19:5). In other words, he turned to sleep for a refuge, neglecting the things that could usher his return to strength. In the same way, Christians suffering from spiritual depression will often stop reading their Bible. They will stop attending church or fellowshiping with other believers and, instead, they will start sleeping all the time. Spiritual depression, if unabated, can lead to isolation from everyone and everything—if not in body, at least in mind and heart.

■ THE IMPORTANCE OF FELLOWSHIP

Although it is reassuring to know that you are not the only one experiencing this, perhaps you are still wondering: How exactly am I going to get through?

Well, first, it is important to realize that God has given you the Body of Christ. For example, when you go to church, the Lord is using your pastor and others there to remind you that He has not abandoned you. That is why the Bible tells us: *“Do not neglect the assembling of yourselves, especially as the day draws closer”* (see Hebrews 10:25). In other words, do not neglect gathering with other believers, especially in our day as darkness begins to increase. Don’t try to get through this alone; don’t try to hide your struggles. Tell the truth when somebody asks you, “How are you doing?” Don’t play a religious game, assuming you have to project the image of a victorious Christian all the time.

However, the good news is that even if you do try to isolate yourself, the Lord will seek you out. We see in the Bible that Elijah *“went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’”* (1 Kings 19:9–10). In that place where Elijah attempted to shut himself away, the Lord did not abandon him. In the same way, Jesus will come to you and ask you why you are in such despair. And the amazing thing is that He is not offended if your answer is confusing!

You see, one of the things about spiritual depression is that you start thinking wrong. You start having wrong thoughts about God, about yourself, and about other people. Elijah said, *“They have killed Your prophets with the sword; they have torn down Your altars, and I am the only one left!”* (see 1 Kings 19:14). Yet that was not actually true, for there were seven thousand more whom God had reserved in Israel. Elijah also insisted, *“They seek to take my life”* (1 Kings 19:14). Actually, “they” were not seeking his life, it was only Jezebel, a wicked queen.

In spiritual depression, you can reach a point where it feels as if everybody is against you; suddenly you do not trust anyone anymore. But just as God was not offended by Elijah’s confusion, He will not walk away from you simply because you have come to some wrong conclusions about your situation.

■ THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Bible also tells us that Elijah *“slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, ‘Arise and eat’”* (1 Kings 19:5). How interesting that it was a broom tree because, realistically, it was a place where the devil was trying to sweep him out of the kingdom of God! *“And he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar*

of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.' So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God" (1 Kings 19:6–8).

No matter how discouraged you are, the Holy Spirit will be standing beside you, reminding you of who you are.

Here we see another reason why you can be confident that you will get through any season of spiritual depression: The Lord Himself will minister to you, just as He did to Elijah. The Bible says that when we need it, the Holy Spirit will bring to our remembrance the things we have learned (see John 14:26).

For example, when you feel as if everything is hopeless, suddenly you will wake up in the middle of the night with verses of Scripture rolling through your mind. *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). *"No weapon formed against you will prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn"* (Isaiah 54:17). No matter how discouraged you are, the Holy Spirit will be standing beside you, reminding you of who you are and giving you new strength!

■ THE TENDERNESS OF GOD

"Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains

and broke the rocks in pieces 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; and after the fire a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11–12).

Although God is all-powerful and could deliver us in any way He desires—He could split the mountains, He could send fire down—He instead chooses to use the greatest weapon of all to draw us out of despair: His tenderness! We see here that He came to Elijah with a still, small voice.

No wonder David the king said, *"Your gentleness has made me great"* (Psalm 18:35). Rather than dealing with us in the way we deserve, the Lord chooses to endure our failings and walk with us in our struggles. He is a gentle Savior, and He will not allow us to be burdened beyond what we can bear!

■ A LOVE FOR PEOPLE

There is one other thing that God did to pull Elijah out of his despair. Remember, in Elijah's mind, it had always been about crowds, confrontation, and bringing the nation back to God. He had a grand vision of his life and what God was able to do through him. Yet it was when that vision did not fully manifest that despair hit his heart.

However, notice that God did not send Elijah back to Mount Carmel saying, "Go rebuild the altar, and I will send another fire," or "Go back to the city and challenge Jezebel." Instead, the Lord essentially said to him: "I want you to get up, and I want you to walk with Me. You are going to anoint two people who will be secular leaders with profound impact in the nation. You are also going to anoint one man who will take your place as a spiritual voice to the nation" (see 1 Kings 19:15). Amazing! The rest of Elijah's

life would, at least initially, be about three people! God was going to anoint three people through his life, and they would go on to become conquerors, raising their hands against evil.

I believe God's desire was simply for Elijah to touch the lives of these three with the same tenderness that he received from the Lord. I can picture Elijah at that point emerging from his despair, saying, "I can do that! I can touch the lives of three people."

When Elijah went to Elisha and put his mantle upon him, saying, "Come and follow me," Elisha said, "Please, just let me go say goodbye to my household" (see 1 Kings 19:20). Ordinarily, Elijah would have concluded, "If you are turning back, you are not fit for the kingdom of God," and he would have continued on his way. However, the Scriptures tell us that Elisha had to take his oxen and slaughter them, then call together all his family and friends to say goodbye. I imagine this must have taken a few weeks.

All the while, Elijah was waiting for him. It is unlikely that Elijah would have done that before. Yet now he had experienced what it was like to be weak; he had been touched by the tenderness of God. Being in a place of despair worked something into his character that had not been there before. I believe that for the first time in his life, he was actually enjoying people!

■ PAUL'S JOURNEY TO TENDERNESS

We see another picture of this in the life of the apostle Paul. When he started out on his journey with God, he was driven to the point of being intolerant, evidenced in his dealings with a young man named Mark. *"Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then*

the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark” (Acts 15:37–39).

You see, in his zeal, Paul was just like the Elijah type in the Body of Christ who concludes, “Anybody turning back is not fit for the kingdom of God.” Even I used to be like that as a young preacher. I once grabbed a man at the altar who said he could not stop drinking. “I did, and you can, too!” I exclaimed to him.

But what does God do in His mercy? He allows us to reach a place of weakness and despair, and that is when His tenderness comes into our lives. If you sequentially follow Paul’s writings, you can see that tenderness emerging over the course of his life. Near the end, he even instructs another disciple, “Bring Mark, for he is profitable for the ministry” (see 2 Timothy 4:11). He had become a completely different man!

Can you believe God for three people?

How do you think that happened? I believe it was because, as he depicted his time in Asia, “*we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life*” (2 Corinthians 1:8). In other words, “We did not think we were going to make it. Apart from the strength of God, we could not get through.” I cannot help but wonder if in that moment he remembered Mark. After all, it is often when we find ourselves in our own place of weakness and trials that we look back and remember others to

whom we were unkind. We suddenly recognize that we ourselves have failed and struggled. We needed a kind word from somebody; we needed the body of Christ, for none of us can make it on this journey alone!

■ YOUR COMMISSION

So if you have been suffering from spiritual depression, my question to you is: Can you believe God for three people? Can you believe that God will use your life to touch them, just as He did with Elijah, and that they will go on to make a difference for the kingdom? Are you willing to acknowledge that your role in the Body of Christ is not lost?

I encourage you to allow God to recommission you today. He is willing to pull you out of despair and give you a new vision for the future. Remember, it was when Elijah stepped out to do the three things God had put before him that the depression left!

One other thing I love about Elijah’s story is that after Elisha said his goodbyes, “*he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant*” (1 Kings 19:21). Remember that the first thing Elijah did when depression hit was abandon his servant—the very one whom God had sent to encourage him. But in the end, when God rekindled and recommissioned Elijah, God gave him a friend! My prayer is that God will give each of us friends in the Body of Christ as well—a beautiful reminder that we are never alone on this journey!

Carter Conlon
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CARTER CONLON

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TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the Switchblade.” It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Prayer Service	
Friday	7:00PM	The Gate*	

*Youth and Young Adult Service

Live Webcast:

All our Sunday and Tuesday services can be watched live and replayed for seven days on our website.

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