

“Survival”

1 Kings 19:4-15, Matthew 11:28-30, 14:22-27 & John 15: 9-11

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PRAYER FOR UNDERSTANDING Gracious God please help us listen to your good news. Amen

One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight, for a very long time, of the shore. Each of us is a broken person on a journey to shalom, that is completeness, wholeness, tranquility, prosperity, peace, love, joy, unity with God, community with all people, harmony with the cosmos. Good nutrition, sleep, plenty of movement, time in nature, conversations, sabbath, therapy, positive self talk, easily completed tasks to build upon and serving each other help one journey through fear, hate, and depression to shalom.

The percentage of adults in the United States that have been diagnosed with depression at some point in their lifetime is 29%. It is estimated that 50 percent of adults experience some form of depression at some point. I encourage you if you think you may have depression, talk to your doctor and a mental health profession. Everyone benefits from working with some type of counselor, therapist, life coach, or spiritual director. Everyone benefits from having a good friend where each person takes turns talking and listening.

The prophet Elijah was overwhelmed by hate, paralyzed by fear, and suffering severe depression. Scripture explains: **1 Kings 19:4 NLT “Elijah sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.”** God’s therapy begins with a tree. In the barren wilderness, Elijah was drawn to a solitary tree. I have shared plenty of sermons on the healing trees provide.

Scripture continues: **1 Kings 19:5-6 NLT “Then Elijah lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, “Get up and eat!” He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.”** God’s therapy involves consistent sleep and good nutrition. Strive for 7 to 9 hours of quality sleep every day. Strive to eat healthy foods and drink plenty of water.

Scripture continues: **1 Kings 19:7-8 NLT “Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched Elijah and said, “Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you.” So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. There he came to a cave, where he spent the night.”** God’s therapy involves daily exercise, getting up and moving, walking, preferably in nature. If you can’t get outside use technology. When I was recovering from surgery, I went on virtual hikes through YouTube. Physical movement creates momentum to carry one through hate, fear, and depression. God’s therapy involves sabbath, one day a week away from work, away from the stress of life to recharge. And occasionally, extended sabbath to a thin place for you were you experience, love, joy, peace, renewal, a place where you experience God. If you can afford to travel for your sabbath, marvelous; if not, we are blessed with numerous wonderful parks, affordable high school plays, free music, access to art, farmers markets, and the Como Conservatory. When you feel depleted recharge in the places that energize you.

Scripture continues: **1 Kings 19:9-10 NLT “But the Lord said to Elijah, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Elijah replied, “I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”** God’s therapy involves safe people who we can talk honestly about our feelings, fears, and struggles. Every month my spiritual director begins our conversation with a question: “How do you come?”

Scripture continues: **1 Kings 19:11-13 NLT “11 “Go out and stand before me on the mountain,” the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.”** God’s therapy involves a vision quest, a supernatural experience in which one seeks interaction with God to obtain direction. My spiritual director asks: “Where is God in that?”

After the vision quest, God asks the same question. **1 Kings 19:13 NLT “What are you doing here, Elijah?”** Although Elijah gives the exact same answer in words, I assume that if we were with Elijah we would see a change in his mood, attitude, perspective, understanding, energy, and mental health. God listened to Elijah. There was a shift from negative self talk to positive self talk. Before God’s therapy, Elijah is rattling off all that is wrong with the world, all that is wrong with himself, lamenting that there is no way out. He is drowning in negative self talk, planning his suicide, and praying for death. After God’s therapy, he sees the glory, wonder, and majesty of life. He is now able to engage his inner mind in positive conversation. He still sees his brokenness and the myriad of problems in the world, but he has hope and can imagine how God is transforming the world with love and how God is changing all to be glorious.

Scripture continues: **1 Kings 19:15 NLT “Then the Lord told Elijah, “Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram.”** God’s therapy his repetition here. Go, movement, exercise, creating momentum through action. Travel a familiar path, naming gratitudes. Since Elijah has spent time in therapy with God, he can now reframe what is happening to him. He can now see how his love is making a difference, how he is bringing more of heaven to earth. A new aspect of God’s therapy is giving Elijah a specific, small task that can be easily completed and built upon. In crisis, it is critical to do the next right thing, to break down your life into small, manageable tasks. Each step, each task should be as simple as possible. Simple, directed action is the key to regaining normal psychological functioning. Rather than fast-forwarding our thoughts out to all the potential negative outcomes, one gets unstuck by breaking the situation down into manageable parts. God helped Elijah move from feeling like he is the victim, that he has no control, that he cannot solve his own problems, by sending him to help another. Serving others is wonderful therapy.

God gave Elijah a toolbox of survival skills, good nutrition, sleep, plenty of movement, time in nature, conversations, sabbath, therapy, positive self talk, easily completed tasks to build upon and serving each other to help him continue on the way. Even with a full toolbox of God given survival skills, as Dr. Seuss says: “When you are in a slump you are not in for much fun. Unslumping yourself is not easily done.”

God is always with us. Wherever you run away. God is there with you. However, you want to give up. God will never quit on you. God is always surrounding you with love. God meets you wherever you are at and is guiding you through hate, fear, and depression to abundant life. Jesus said: **Matthew 11:28-30 MSG “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”**

In Matthew chapter 14, people are freaking out. John the Baptist has been beheaded by a mother who used her daughter to make the murderous request and then brought John’s head on a platter to her mother. This atrocity was the last straw for many people who were already struggling personally with hate, fear, and depression. These people flocked to Jesus. Jesus invited them to rest, to sit down and enjoy a nutritious meal of fish and bread.

The gospel of Matthew tells what happens next. **Matthew 14:22-27 NLT “Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while Jesus sent the people home. After sending them home, Jesus went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. About three o’clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, “It’s a ghost!” But Jesus spoke to them at once. “Take courage, it is I am; do not be afraid.”**

After rest and a nutritious meal, Jesus tells the disciples to get some exercise rowing a boat in the beauty of nature, to complete a simple task, crossing the lake, to serve people on the other side. A storm arises and the boat is battered by wave after wave. The disciples row with all their might and get now where, at times they even lose ground. The waves are real physical waves and mental waves of negative thoughts, anxiety, and hopelessness. Jesus has embodied God’s redeeming grace for everyone, healed people, fed people, welcomed people back into community, forgave everyone, loves everyone and is trying to make everyone’s joy complete with God’s infinite joy. All of it is glorious and still there is hate and fear and murder. Life is like this boat, we are striving with all our might to get to the glorious way of love and at times we are going nowhere, at times we are going backwards. The cosmic forces of wind and waves symbolize the social forces that are resisting the grace of God and openly persecuting the disciples.

The disciples knew Jesus well and yet they perceived him as a ghost. They were terrified, paralyzed with a panic attack. Likewise, we also at times get overwhelmed and are unable to perceive God present with us. Jesus spoke familiar words, abundant with symbolism and did well familiar actions that filled them with shalom.

Jesus is hovering over the torturous waters. Genesis explains that in the beginning the Holy Spirit hovered over chaotic waters and God created goodness, order, rhythm, light and dark, day and night, oceans and land. God hovered over the formless, empty void and created plants, animals and humanity. God is hovering over all today redeeming all to goodness.

Jesus said: "Take courage it is I am" echoing the Exodus story. God told Moses to have courage to partner with God to liberate the Israelites from racism, income inequality, slavery, oppression, and abuse. God is "I am" beyond all labels, names, constraints, and images. God is infinite in love, peace, joy, and goodness. All things are possible with God. God will do glories beyond our grandest imagination. "I am" is far more than capable of cleaning up the mess of the world and the mess of our lives. "I am" is here, strolling over the waves, the liberator of Israel, the creator of the world, the victor over chaos, the resurrection and the life over death and the love who will ultimately get us through every ordeal to the shalom of abundant life. "I am" is greater than all the forces that threaten grace, life, and your well-being. What you think directly influences how you feel, and how you feel directly influences how your body reacts, and how your body reacts directly influences how you behave, and how you behave comes to define who you are and what you experience in life. The disciples have a choice to think about the wind, waves, chaos, hate, death, and fear or the infinite goodness "I am" is bring to each of us and the cosmos. Who you identify with shapes your life.

The winds that are blasting the disciples have no effect on Jesus. The waves that are battering the disciples are not hindering Jesus. All this happens about three o'clock in the morning the time when God rescued the Israelites by dividing the Red Sea. It was three o'clock when the Israelites were terrified, paralyzed in fear. The mighty Egyptian army was charging at them with chariots to slaughter them. The army had them surrounded except for the sea, but it was too far to swim, they would all drown. God was with them and divided the sea to provide safe passage. It foreshadows God dividing the temple curtain, overcoming death to provide safe passage for everyone to resurrection eternal life in our true home heaven.

In the Exodus story, people overcame their fear by exercising, walking, journeying, for forty years. God provided good nutrition, mana. God provided oases for them to enjoy sabbath. God prescribed two tablets of ways to love God and love everyone for their ailments. God provided therapy through signs, worship, prayer, Moses and the tribe of Levi, the tribe of priests, spiritual directors and mental health professionals. They camped in nature. They had plenty of time for conversations and friendships. They were all on a journey together to the Promised Land, some were leaders, some eagerly journeyed, others wanted to hunker down, and still others had to be dragged kicking, screaming, wining and complaining the entire way. Their journey was broken down into small easily managed tasks that they were able to build upon. They cared for each other.

We regularly pray, God's kingdom come. Most of us are actively trying to bring heaven to earth. Our striving is hindered by fear. Fear of failure. Fear that violence, ignorance, greed, injustice, hate, and death are too much for us, that we will be unable to overcome all that diminishes life with all that enhances life. Fear that we will become too broken to be made whole. Fear that we are too sinful to be fully forgiven. Fear that our life is meaningless. Fear that we will lose our life. God emphatically proclaims: "I am" with you. "I am" the resurrection and the life. "I am" will get you through every fear, through everything, to a perfect life in the glorious kingdom of God forever.

Jesus is with you. Jesus is saying to you: "Take courage it is I am." The First Nations translation of the gospel of John explains: **John 15:9-11 FNT "Jesus said. "In the same way the Great Spirit loves me, I have loved you. Never stop walking this road of love. By doing what the Great Spirit has told me, I lived in love. As you walk in my ways, my love will remain in you. I am saying this so your hearts will be filled with the same joy I have."** God is giving each of us resurrection resources, survival skills of trees, good nutrition, sleep, plenty of movement, time in nature, conversations, sabbath, therapy, positive self talk, easily completed tasks to build upon and opportunities to serve each other to get us all through hate, fear and depression to shalom, glorious life overflowing with blessings beyond our grandest imagination. Amen