

“Mental Health” – 1 Kings 19

Okay, I have question for you. Have any of you ever been physically sick? Anybody? Maybe you have had a cold or the flu or measles, mumps, Mad Cow disease, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, eye disease, thigh disease, whatever. What? All of you? Everybody here has been physically sick before? Oh dear! Well, I guess that means you are not very good Christians then, doesn't it? Or else, maybe it means that God doesn't care about you or that He is not able to heal you. Is that what it means? I know. Because you got a cold one time means Satan must be attacking you. And because you got cancer means you don't eat right. And you got diabetes because you are weak. So, that settles it. Hope that helps. Now, let me ask you another question. Are you believing any of these lies this morning? Are you believing that every physical ailment is an attack by Satan? I hope not. It could be in your case but not always. Are you believing that you got heart disease because God doesn't love you? Are you believing that you got cancer because of your sin? I hope not. You can't make those kinds of blanket statements. There might be some truth to some of that. You might get heart disease because you don't eat right but that's not always the case.

Physical sickness is caused by all kinds of different things. The symptoms are all different. The treatments are all different and the recovery all looks differently. And even when two people have the same ailment, it might look completely different for those two people. I remember getting covid a while back and thinking, *“I've had colds worse than this.”* And yet there are people that are still trying to recover from their battle with covid from two years ago. All of this is why your primary care physician probably makes a lot of money. They have to be able to diagnose all kinds of symptoms that look differently in everybody. No two people are the same and no two treatments do the same in everybody. And that is a statement I can confidently make even though I am no doctor. Now...I say all of that to say that even though I am not a psychiatrist or psychologist, nor am I a clinical therapist or any kind of counselor, I can say with confidence that our mental health has a lot in common with our physical health. No two people are the same. No two symptoms look the same. No two treatments do the same in everybody and everybody heals mentally in different ways. And...we all get sick to some degree or another.

I want to talk this morning about mental health. It's a topic that is in the news a lot these days, in fact, probably more than ever. And that tells me that more people struggle with it now more than ever. The problem with us talking about it is the question you have in your mind right now that asks, *“Who does Todd think he is to talk on such a subject?”* And that's a good question. I just told you I have no professional qualifications in this area. And I'll be honest. Satan asked me that same question several times this week. But my answer to him and to you is that I am not qualified but scripture is. Our Bible is qualified to answer all the questions of our life including the heavy stuff like mental health. Also, I think about Paul talking about creation having birth pains in **Romans 8**. Well, what in the world did Paul know about birth pains? He didn't but he could do research and find out. He could ask around or read about it. And the Holy Spirit guided him to say that. I hope I can say the same about my research and the Holy spirit leading me.

But right now, let's all turn to the Old Testament book of **1 Kings**. 1 Kings is between **2 Samuel** and, believe it or not, **2 Kings** which is next to **1 Chronicles**. And as you turn there, let me just assure you that you are not the reason I am preaching this today. If you struggle with your mental health, you may be thinking, *“Oh great. He heard I was depressed or that I was angry and now he's preaching to me.”* That is not the case. I hope this helps you but we all struggle with our mental health to one degree or another and this is for everybody and not because of any one person.

I love this story in **1 Kings**. When I get to Heaven, one of the first people I want to look up is Elijah. In scripture, Elijah comes off kind of grumpy and grouchy. I hope he has gotten over that while he has been in Heaven because I want to hear some stories. I want to get Elijah and Elisha together and hear about all the miracles they did. I want to hear about bringing the widow's son back to life and about God causing the wind, earthquake and fire and then hearing God's still,

small voice. I want to hear about predicting the drought and eating food brought by ravens and so many more. You know, in **James 5** it says that Elijah was just like us and I always think, *“Oh, yea, I took off my mantle the other day and slapped Lake Bridgeport with it and then crossed over on dry ground.”* Haven’t we all done that? That’s no big deal. He was just like us. (I don’t even have a mantle!) Anyway, but there is one way that Elijah was like us. He struggled mentally. And honestly, as I was preparing for this message I found it difficult to decide on who in scripture to use as an example of that. David struggled with mental health. Moses, Abraham and Jacob all struggled with it. I’d say Sampson struggled with it. Jonah did. Lots of the Old Testament kings struggled with it. In the New Testament, Peter stands out as a great example. In his letter to the Roman church, the apostle Paul wrote, *“for what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate... For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.”* Do you see the mental anguish there? So, if you get only one thing out of this today, know you are not alone in your mental struggles. But Elijah...Superman Elijah. Surely he didn’t struggle mentally did he? Let’s read **1 Kings 19:1-13**. And if it’s been a while since you read this story, let me remind you that Elijah has just had a literal mountaintop experience. He has prayed and called down fire from Heaven and showed up 450 other false prophets on Mount Carmel. He has seen God do a miracle that we can only imagine. He has proven God to be the one and only true God and now all of that is over. You would think he would be celebrating and high-fiving all the Israelites as they hoist him on their shoulders and have a parade in his honor. But let’s read what really happened.

**1 Kings 19:1-13** says, *“Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.” 3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 4 while he himself 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.” 5 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” 6 He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. 7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” 8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. 9 There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 10 He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” 11 The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

Let’s stop right there. So, obviously the moral of this story is that sometimes you just need some hot, homemade bread to make you feel better, right? No, that’s not it. Although that might help. No, the real story is that Elijah, the great man of God, the great prophet used by God, the superman who did so many miracles...believed some lies and, when mixed with some other factors we will see, it affected his mental health. Lie number one is Jezebel was going to kill him. I’m sure she wanted to but God had protected and provided for Elijah so many times, all Elijah had to do was be obedient and patient. But that is hard to do on a good day, isn’t it. Then you mix in fatigue, hunger, and fear and Elijah was in a bad way mentally.

Lie number two is that he was all alone. He didn’t know it but God told him later that there were 7,000 others just like him in Israel. But from where Elijah was on the mountain and then in the desert, it didn’t feel like there were others. It felt like he was all alone.

Lie number three is that God wasn't even with him. But He was right there with him just a gentle whisper away. There were other factors involved as well. As I mentioned, he was hungry and tired and that is when Satan loves to attack. If he can't attack when you are hungry and tired, he also likes to attack when you are bored or stressed. And I mention those because we need to watch for the triggers that set us off. If you know you are tempted to do something or feel a certain way at certain times, then do your best to stay away from those situations. Another time Satan likes to attack is when you are just coming off a mountaintop experience. How many times have you left church on Sunday morning feeling great and uplifted by the great worship time and then you barely get in the car and you are arguing with your spouse about some stupid thing? Satan hates those mountaintop experiences and will hit you with both barrels as soon as he can. So, be aware of those times. Be aware of Satan prowling around like a roaring lion.

I looked online and found some common lies that we all hear these days. The most common ones are - The check is in the mail. - I'll start my diet tomorrow. One size fits all. Leave your resume and we'll keep it on file. Let's have lunch sometime. - It's not the money, it's the principle. Or when Billy says, *"I can say this in three minutes or less."* Clay, don't you laugh about that! But for people who struggle with depression or anger or sadness or being bipolar or anxiety or whatever it is you struggle with, there are some other lies we often believe. I have just a few. Lie number one is that you need to stay silent about your struggle. Don't tell anybody. That's a lie. Now, telling somebody about where you struggle is always risky. I often ask the guys in jail when I'm there, where do you struggle? And some of them are too honest for that situation. If you struggle with lust, just say "lust." I don't want to know all the gory details about the sexy dwarf circus clown on the trapeze. You don't have to give those details.

But when your mind is a battleground and your mental health is under attack, you need to share it with somebody. Yes, there is the risk of telling the wrong person and being made fun of or trivialized but that is why God made counselors. There is nothing wrong with getting professional help. We probably all need to see some kind of therapist every now and then just like we need to get a physical every now and then. So, don't believe the lie that you have to stay silent about your struggle. Lie number two is that my struggle defines me. It's who I am. I am depressed and that's my life. I am sad or anxious. That's just how God made me. No, no, no. God made you in His image. Now, even God has sadness at times. But like Him, we don't have to stay there and be defined by it. You might want to write these scriptures down to reference later...

I say (or have said) I am scarred but God says I am healed. Isaiah 53:5 I say I am weak, but God says He makes me strong. Psalm 18:32 I recognize I am a sinner, but God says I am forgiven. 1 John 2:12 I was abandoned, but God says I am adopted. Ephesians 1:5 I say I am broken, but God says He makes me whole. Colossians 2:10 I have been rejected, but God says I am His! Isaiah 43:1 I say I have no purpose, but God says I was created with purpose. Esther 4:14 I say I have failed, but God says I am victorious in Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:57 I say I am worried, anxious, or afraid, but God says with Him I am peace-filled. (John 14:27). I say I am unhappy, but God says I am joyful/joy-filled. (John 15:11) I say I am afraid, but God says I am powerful, loved, and have a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7 (drmichellebengtson.com) We are made in His image and that is who He says we are!

Let's go to lie number three. I must be a bad Christian. That's a common thought. It's an ancient thought. Job's buddies just knew that was the case for Job. Job's friends sat on the ground with him for seven days and nights and then the mistake they made was opening their mouths because they believed the lie that because Job felt the way he did after all that had happened to him, Job must be a horrible sinner.

I want you to know that I know that this message will not answer all your questions. It won't solve all your mental problems. I know that because sometimes the answers just aren't there. Sometimes God allows or even causes things to go wrong in our lives and He has wired our brains to not be able to handle it. Does knowing that make your depression go away? Does that knowledge make you giddy with happiness? Of course not. But it should make you want to be even closer to God so you can rest in His peace and in His grace. I will tell you that this thought is made more prevalent in our society because of certain preachers today who preach a health and wealth Gospel. They say if you are a good enough

person then God will bless you with health (mental and physical) and with money. AND...since you have that money, just send them some of it. I'm so sick and tired of that. Jesus said that in this life you will have trouble. (John 16:33) So, here's what I need you to do. This is your requirement the next time you hear a preacher say that God will give you health and wealth if you are a good Christian. I don't want you to just change the channel. First, I want you to go plth (blow a raspberry) real loud and then change the channel. Okay?

We are running out of time so let me give you one last lie that so many believe. That lie says there is no hope. Now, let me ask you a question. Is it a fact that God loves you? Do you truly believe that? John 3:16 says it so you better believe it. Now, is God in control of what happens to you? Do you absolutely believe that? *"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."* (Isaiah 43:2) That is said by someone who not only is with you but is in control of the waters, the rivers, the fire and the flame. The father of lies wants you to believe there is no hope but God said in **Jeremiah 29:11**, *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."* And that thought is brought out again in the New Testament where it says in **Romans**, *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28) God has a purpose and a plan for bringing you through what you are going through. I don't know it. You'll have to ask Him and there is a good chance He won't answer right away. You just have to trust and obey no matter how you feel. But just like He was for Elijah, God is just a still small voice away. But you have to be very close to Him to hear it.

In closing, let me tell you this that several years ago, the men of our church went through a video series on porn. Let me be clear when I say that. We did not watch a porn video. We watched a video on porn. Two different things. And in that video we learned that every time we think about anything, there is a chemical reaction in our brain. And those chemicals make a pathway – a neural pathway – for that thought. And every time you think about that thing, that pathway is made wider and smoother and easier to get to. It's like a trail through the woods. The more it is traveled, the easier it is to travel. You can see how that would be a problem with something like porn. But it goes for everything we think about. If you think about fishing or knitting or your spouse or anything, the more you think about that thing, the easier it is for your mind to get there. But we learned that the brain has what is called neural plasticity. It is moldable. It can change. Those neural pathways can be changed in the same way that a path through the woods can get overgrown with grass and weeds. You just go there less and less.

You know, it's like God knew what He was saying or something when He told Paul to write **Romans 12:2** that says, *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* This world, with the wars and the kids and the jobs and the internet and Facebook and Instagram and everything else that causes us to struggle mentally, this world with Satan as the prince of it (Eph. 2:2, John 12:31) wants you to conform to it. It wants you to struggle mentally and every other way just like everybody else. But the Holy Spirit is living inside of you, if you are a true believer, and will guide you into all truth. That's what it says in **John 16:13**. And the truth will set you free. The truth will help you to renew your mind. But just like a path through the woods, it won't happen overnight. It is a process and it can be painful. And it will be difficult. But all we have to do is trust and obey. Now, all of this message has been for believing Christians. It has been for those who have asked God to forgive them and to cleanse them and to be the Lord of their whole life. And they have repented of that old lifestyle and turned toward God. As for you unbelievers...I don't know what to tell you. Good luck, I guess.

But if you want that ability to conquer your mental issues; if you want forgiveness; if you want freedom and peace and joy even in the difficult times then today is the day and you are in the right place. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes and right now I would love to pray with you about this. Do it right now as the music plays.