

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS

MARCH16 2024

doubt in the valley

Scripture Story: 1 Kings 18:41-46; 19:1-18.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapters 12; 13.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

After Elijah's stunning victory for the Lord on Mount Carmel, the wicked Queen Jezebel threatened his life. Facing down the prophets of Baal didn't daunt Elijah, but running for his life seemed to plunge him into despair. Elijah, believing he was the only true worshiper of God left in Israel, became so discouraged he wished he could die. God sent an angel to minister to him, then spoke to Elijah with His own "still, small voice" to assure Elijah that he was not alone.

This story about Elijah emphasizes the fact that all God's followers will face times of discouragement and despair as well as "mountaintop" experiences such as the triumph on Mount Carmel. When the angel steps in and guides Elijah to take care of his physical needs of rest and food, it reveals how the physical and emotional aspects of our lives affect each other.

God's Word gives a great deal of helpful guidance to help believers get through the "down" times that are a part of the Christian experience. Young Christians need to know that times of discouragement are not proof that their faith is false or that they are "bad Christians," but rather opportunities to grow spiritually.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Know that lows as well as highs are part of the Christian life. *(Know)*
- Believe that God still cares and is helping them even when they are feeling down. *(Feel)*
- Develop strategies to help strengthen their faith during times of discouragement. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Christian Behavior, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 22

"We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. . . . (Gen. 7:2; Exod. 20:15; Lev. 11:1-47; Ps. 106:3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 10:5; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 2:4; 4:8; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 John 2:6; 3 John 2.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Ask students about their strategies for dealing with discouragement. List positive suggestions on a white/chalkboard at the front of the room, starting with the ones in the lesson and adding others the group suggests.

Ask: Have you used any of these strategies when you've been feeling bad? Did you think of them as "strategies" at the time?

Say: We react in lots of ways when we're feeling bad, but we don't always *think* about how we react. What do you think is actually more effective in helping you feel better?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Do you like riding on roller coasters? Some people love the thrill, while others hate the terror and stay as far away from roller coasters as they can.

Many people describe the ups and downs of emotions as a roller coaster ride. The highs and lows are steeper for some people than for others, but everyone experiences both—ups and downs. Unlike a roller coaster, no one experiences excitement as they begin the downward plunge into discouragement and despair. Yet that downward ride is one everyone has to take at some point. The question is: How will you handle it?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Everyone experiences down times and bad feelings—even Christians. Some people suggest that the Christian life is all happiness and sunshine without any problems, but all mature Christians know that's not true. Even a faithful prophet such as Elijah knew discouragement so seriously he even considered suicide! Discouragement is not the mark of an unsuccessful Christian—it's the mark of a growing one. Growing in faith involves not only learning to trust God through the valleys as well as the mountaintops, but also reaching out to others when we need help. For those of you interested in resources dealing with depression and/or suicide, go to www.cornerstoneconnections.net. Remember, no matter how helpless or hopeless you may feel, there is help, hope, healing, and freedom in God!

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

Looking back at Elijah's experiences in this story and over the last few weeks, try drawing a "life map" of Elijah's faith journey. Draw it on the board in front of your room using students' suggestions. The "map" can be a simple timeline of Elijah's experiences, but instead of drawing a straight horizontal line, draw high points and low points along the line (like a roller coaster) to indicate the ups and downs in Elijah's spiritual journey (see "Rabbi 101" below for more on creating life maps). Use pictures, symbols, or Bible references to indicate specific points in Elijah's life.

Then invite students to draw their own life maps, indicating high and low points in their lives, especially as they relate to their spiritual experience. High points might include things such as giving their heart to Jesus, baptism, attending summer camp or a youth rally, sharing Jesus with a friend, having a prayer answered, while the low points will indicate experiences that led to doubt, discouragement, and sadness. Assure students they can keep their maps private. As they finish, use some of the Bible verses from the *Punch Lines* section of the student lesson to remind them that God is with them in every stage of their life journey—in the low points as well as the high points.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Matthew 11:28–30; Isaiah 43:1, 2; John 16:33.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

This lesson focuses on the ups and downs that are a natural part of the Christian experience. Young people need to learn that faith is not based on feelings; holding on to their faith even when they feel sad and discouraged is an important part of growing in Jesus.

In discussing this topic, it's important not to ignore the very real subtopic of clinical depression. Sad feelings and discouragement are part of everyone's life, but in some people these can become extreme, leading to a serious depression. Many teenagers suffer from depression, which may be triggered by life events such as loss of a loved one, violence or abuse, family breakup, and so on. Depression can also occur even when there's no apparent life cause, probably as a result of a chemical imbalance in the brain.

This week's lesson suggests a number of strat-

egies that are useful for dealing with spiritual lows and discouragement: prayer, faith, relying on God's promises, exercise, rest, keeping a positive attitude, serving others, and so on. While these strategies may also be useful to a person suffering from serious depression, they are usually not enough. Professional help in the form of counseling or therapy, and in some cases medication, may be part of God's plan for helping young people with depression. Just telling someone who is clinically depressed to "cheer up and trust God!" is not helpful.

To help make this distinction clear in the minds of your students, it might be helpful to review some of the warning signs that distinguish depression from a bad mood or "down" feelings. Young people who experience several of these signs for more than two weeks at a time should seek help for depression:

- Feeling sad or discouraged most of the time, especially for "no reason"
- Lack of energy or feeling tired all the time
- Inability to enjoy activities they usually enjoy
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Irritability and anxiety
- Inability to concentrate
- Significant weight gain or loss
- Change in sleep patterns
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Aches and pains with no physical cause
- Pessimism; indifference toward the future
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Drawing a Life Map

Drawing a life map is a good way to explore the life of a historical or biblical character; it's also a good way for students to reflect on their own spiritual journey. It's similar to drawing a timeline of events, but instead of a straight line moving forward through time, you can use a life map to illustrate ups and downs, twists and turning points. Visual symbols can be used to illustrate important events. For tips and examples, check out the links below or Google the phrase "life map."

The following site has good tips, though no visual images. It suggests using only pictures, never words, on a life map, but this is just a guideline and need not be followed rigidly; adapt the idea to your own needs: www.educationworld.com/a_tsl/archives/05-1/lesson023.shtml.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Hand out index cards and pencils. Say: "When Elijah was most discouraged, God spoke to him with a 'still, small voice' or a 'gentle voice.' As you think about the things we've discussed and the Bible texts we've read today, imagine what God's gentle voice might be saying to you right now. It could be a Bible verse or just a sentence of encouragement. Write down what you believe God's message to you is when you are discouraged and need help. Keep it in your Bible to read when you need it most."

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Elijah was on the mountaintop when God sent fire down from heaven. He was uplifted and filled with the Holy Spirit, just like a Christian who has recently been baptized or given their heart to Jesus. But soon Elijah had to face fear and danger, and he experienced such a severe discouragement that he wanted to die.

Maybe you've felt like that at times. Maybe you've been down, discouraged, or even depressed. Ups and downs are part of every life, even the Christian life. *Especially* the Christian life. God wants our faith to grow as we learn to trust Him through bad times as well as good. We can trust God to send "fire from heaven" when we need it on the mountaintop. We can also trust Him to speak to us with the "still small voice" of hope and faith when we need encouragement. When you are down, trust God to lift you up.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapters 12; 13.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: 1 Kings 18:41–46; 19:1–18.
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doubt in the valley



Photo by Luis Guerra, Jr.

keytext

"The LORD said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.' "

(1 Kings 19:11, NIV)

flashlight

"For the disheartened there is a sure remedy—faith, prayer, work. Faith and activity will impart assurance and satisfaction that will increase day by day. Are you tempted to give way to feelings of anxious foreboding or utter despondency? In the darkest days, when appearances seem most forbidding, fear not. Have faith in God. He knows your need. He has all power. His infinite love and compassion never weary. . . . Never will He change the covenant He has made with those who love Him" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 164).

what do you think?

Which of the following things help you when you're feeling down or discouraged?

____ Talking to a friend
____ Spending time alone
____ Listening to music
____ Prayer
____ Talking to a parent, counselor, pastor, or other caring adult
____ Exercise
____ Doing something for someone else
____ Other: _____

did you know?

Spiritual highs are often followed by spiritual lows. Just ask anyone who has ever returned from the excitement of a youth retreat or rally to deal with the problems of everyday life. When you're surrounded by other Christians, singing and praising the Lord, it's easy to feel happy, excited, and filled with the Holy Spirit. Three weeks later when you're coping with parents, homework, and peer pressure you may find yourself crashing into discouragement or despair.

The Bible doesn't promise that God's people will never know unhappiness or discouragement. After his triumphant showdown against the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, the prophet Elijah collapsed into discouragement and despair. But God didn't abandon him—and He won't abandon you when times get tough.

INTO THE STORY

"Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 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.'

"Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 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.' Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

"All at once an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' 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.

"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.' 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. . . .

"And the word of the LORD came to him: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

"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.'

"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. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave."

(1 Kings 19:1–13, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Elijah had just won a stunning victory for God. What happened right afterwards to make him feel discouraged?

Do you think Elijah was sincere in wishing he could die? Why or why not?

What was the angel's advice to Elijah immediately after he said he wanted to die? Why do you think this was good advice?

Carefully read Elijah's reply to the Lord's question: "What are you doing here?" What do Elijah's words tell you about how he was feeling at that point?

Why didn't Elijah hear God's voice in the whirlwind, the earthquake, or the fire? What is the significance of God's voice being a "gentle whisper" at this point in Elijah's story?

How can you best hear God's voice speaking to you?

punch lines

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" **(John 16:33, NIV).**

"Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD" **(Psalm 31:24, NIV).**

"Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" **(Isaiah 40:30, 31, NIV).**

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you" **(Isaiah 43:1, 2, NIV).**

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" **(Matthew 11:28, NIV).**

further insight

"It is not always the most learned presentation of God's truth that convicts and converts the soul. . . . It is the still, small voice of the Spirit of God that has power to change the heart."

—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 169

Sabbath

Read 1 Kings 19:1–13.

What does Elijah say after sitting down under the broom tree?

_____

How do you think Elijah felt at that moment?

_____

When have you felt most discouraged in your life? Do you think you've ever felt as bad as Elijah did under the broom tree?

_____

List the specific things God says or does for Elijah to help him through this experience:

_____

Look back at the *What Do You Think?* section of the lesson. What helps you most when you are feeling down? What do you think God might say to you at such a time?

_____

Sunday

Read Matthew 11:28.

Look through the *Out of the Story* questions and think about your answers. Elijah had just won a huge victory for the Lord. Yet when Queen Jezebel threatened his life, he wanted to lie down and die.

Spiritual highs are often followed by spiritual lows. We need both—the highs and the lows, the mountaintops and the valleys—to grow spiritually. Elijah learned through this experience that God wouldn't leave him alone, that God's still small voice was still speaking to him.

Monday

Read Isaiah 40:30, 31.

God told Elijah to stand on the mountaintop and get ready for the Lord's presence. Elijah had already experienced an amazing miracle on Mount Carmel, yet just a few weeks later he needs to stand on another mountaintop and meet God again in order to have his faith renewed.

When we experience "down" times in the Christian life, what are some ways we can stand in God's presence again? List some things that help you to hear God's "still, small voice."

_____

Tuesday

Read 1 John 5:14.

In the *Flashlight* section, Ellen White has some specific suggestions for Christians who are discouraged: faith, prayer, and work.

Faith involves trusting God and knowing that He is still with us, even when we don't feel like it. Our faith is not based on how we feel, but on the Bible's promises that God is faithful and cares for us no matter what.

Prayer is our contact with God. Just as God spoke to Elijah through a gentle voice, He speaks to us in times of prayer. Prayer isn't just talking to God; it involves listening to Him too.

Work takes us outside of our own problems and helps us focus on the needs of others. Doing something kind for someone else can help lift our spirits when we're down. Can you think of something you can do for someone else that might help you to feel better too?

Wednesday

The promises in God's Word can be great for encouraging us when we get discouraged. Look through the texts in the *Punch Lines* and find the one that's most encouraging to you. Copy it on a card or a piece of poster paper. You can even decorate it with pictures or designs. Then put it somewhere it will catch your eye and encourage you next time you're feeling discouraged.

Thursday

Read Psalm 31:24.

It's time to put together some of the things we've learned this week into a "prescription" you can use when discouragement hits. Fill in the blanks to write your unique prescription below. It will also be helpful for you to share this with a supporting friend or two, which will strengthen your resolve to implement it. (Go to www.cornerstoneconnections.net to find resources for choosing a support/accountability partner.)

Next time I feel discouraged, I will talk to _____.
I will listen to _____.
I will think about and repeat this Bible verse: _____.
I will pray, asking God for _____
_____.
I will do three things that I enjoy and that are good for me _____.
I will do the following for someone else: _____.

Friday

Read John 16:33.

Ups and downs are natural in the Christian life. But sometimes we can figure out what triggers the down times and start looking to God for encouragement before we get too far "down."

Elijah's discouragement was triggered by fear of Queen Jezebel and her threats against his life. Fear is one emotion that can often send us spiraling into negative feelings. Others include anger, envy, loneliness, and grief.

What kinds of situations trigger you to start feeling down and discouraged? Try applying some of those remedies you made in yesterday's lesson as soon as negative feelings start. God has the power to get you through the bad times and bring you back to the "mountaintop" again!

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapters 12; 13.

**Royalty in Ruins* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.