

When Things Mess with Your Mind

1 Kings 19:1-18

Good morning! How are you today? I hope you're fine and nothing is messing with your mind. So, let me mess with your mind. I went online and checked out a few things that can mess with your mind.

1. Some blind people have never seen a smile, but they still know how to do it when they're happy.
2. It's amazing how the the human mind does not process the the fact I used the the word "the" twice each time in this sentence.
3. If I punch myself and it hurts, am I too weak or too strong?
4. Every word is a made-up word!
5. You always see your nose. It's just that your brain avoids it.
6. Giraffes sleep on average only 30 minutes daily.
7. You were once the youngest person on earth.
8. Madam, I'm Adam.

These are things that can mess with your mind. You know, they make you think a little bit and you ponder and maybe reflect? And then you say, "No way!" They're challenging, aren't they? But they don't harm you. There are other things in this world, however, that can really mess with your mind and are really more challenging and very dangerous when you don't snap out of it.

What are those things? When you have a lingering illness. When you're out of job. When you can't pay your bills. When your spouse is philandering. When people hurt you or say nasty things about you. When you think of your unpleasant past. When your children are hardheaded. Those are things that make you worry and you think like "I didn't sign up for this" "It's unfair" "Where is God?" "Does he care about me?" "I give up!".

Consider also that during this pandemic, many people are not taking it well. They are affected emotionally and mentally. I read an article from Churchleaders.com that says this, “This year, more than ever due to the pandemic and the social distancing/quarantined measures that have been put in place to fight the coronavirus, people’s mental health and wellness have taken a toll. According to a recent report from ForEveryMom.com, new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveals that 25.5 percent or one in four adults, ages 18-24, say they have contemplated suicide in the past month as a result of the pandemic. The CDC study surveyed over 5,000 people between June 24, 2020 and June 30, 2020. The numbers of those who reported suicidal ideation was up three times from 2019’s second quarter.”

Teenagers are especially vulnerable, they say. Because as you know, teenagers long to get together and have fun with their peers. They are at a very active stage in their lives. So restricting their movements is like putting them on a straitjacket.

Everyone is affected including Christians. But we need to be reminded of God’s promise in **Isaiah 41:10, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”**

Folks, that is the theme verse of our message series for the next four weeks. Let me read that again to encourage you this morning, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Let your mind capture those words and make their way to your heart as you deal with whatever problems you have that are messing with your mind.

That's our theme verse. Our series title is "God's Got You!". Yes, he's got you safe in his hands. Don't ever doubt it. Say to the person next to you, "God's Got You!". If you're watching by yourself, say it to yourself, "God's Got Me!".

So, this first message is entitled, "When Things Mess with Your Mind". Today, I'd like to talk about what you should not do and should do and what God will do for you when things mess with your mind. Our text is from 1 Kings 19:1-18. We're not going to read this. But I'd like you to open your Bibles to this passage. Keep it open during this message as I'll refer to it throughout and you can follow along.

Our message today is based on an episode in the life of Elijah after a great victory. This great victory is when he vanquished the 450 prophets of the false god Baal and the 400 prophets of the false goddess Asherah. If you recall, Elijah faced these prophets after he challenged the evil king Ahab to a spiritual showdown because he had led the Israelites to idolatry. So, Ahab summoned all 850 prophets of his false god and goddess to Mt. Carmel where they had an encounter with Elijah who was just by himself. Elijah let the false prophets go first by letting them call to Baal to send down fire from heaven to light their altar. All day until the evening they called, dancing, praying, crying out loud, even slashing themselves but no fire came down. When it was Elijah's turn, he instructed the Israelites to repair the altar of the Lord and then he dug a trench around it. Afterwards, he laid out pieces of a bull on the wooden altar and instructed his people to douse the altar with water until it was overflowing and filled the trench around it. Then, he prayed to God to send fire and immediately fire fell from heaven and burned everything on the altar even licking up all the water around it. And the Bible says in 1 King 18:39, "When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"

Without a doubt, that was a miraculous victory. Elijah must be really pumped up seeing God's power at work and looking at how suddenly all of his people praising God. It was a mountaintop experience for him, no pun intended. There must be a great revival afterwards. He must be thinking, "Now that King Ahab has seen God's power in display, he must be convinced already that God is real and he would repent. Perhaps, Jezebel, the king's wife, would be convinced as well and there would be a great revival in the land."

Well, the events after that proved him wrong. Because this is what we read in 1 Kings 19:1-2, now look at your Bibles, "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, "Congratulations!" No, that's not what she said. She said rather ominously, "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."

Jezebel just messed with Elijah's mind. He was picturing a bright future for Israel but that picture was immediately torn to pieces by Jezebel's threat on his life.

Today, I'd like to share with you one thing you shouldn't do and three things you can do to handle things, or persons, or circumstances that mess with your mind.

So, **what is the one thing you shouldn't do?**

1. Don't let negative thoughts dwell in your mind.

These seem to be the very things that were in the mind of Elijah when he received a death threat from Jezebel. Verses 3-5 say, "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."

We know that Elijah was a man of courage. He was a man of prayer. He was a man with great faith in God. Why this sudden change in attitude? Why did he feel discouraged and defeated? Note it says he was afraid. Was he afraid of Jezebel? She wasn't even his wife. Why should he be afraid? A saying goes, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned". It's an idiom that means that women often react very angrily to things that upset them. And when a woman is upset, you better get out of the way.

Well, I'm making light of this but actually I don't believe Elijah was afraid of Jezebel. I believe he was just utterly frustrated and disappointed about the sudden turn of events. He expected a better future for Israel but what he got was the opposite. You see, verse 3 is rendered in some versions of the Bible this way, more or less, "And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life" (KJV, ASV, GNV, JUB).

There's a difference in translation because translators have used different sources. In any case, what does it mean if we go with the second translation? The Message version helps us to understand, "When Elijah saw how things were, he ran for dear life." What it's saying is that Elijah saw or recognized the hopelessness of the situation since his victory against the false prophets didn't change the hearts of the King and Queen and, perhaps, the people themselves went back to their old ways. So, it was an overwhelming sense of discouragement, NOT FEAR, that drove Elijah to flee. He was simply getting out of a frustrating and what seemed to be a hopeless situation.

In any case, he ran away from a problem instead of facing it. This makes you wonder because he was a man of great courage. We must realize though that he is not Superman. He was still a mortal just like any of us. He also had a chink in his armor. His faith in God was put to the test by a single frustrating event.

You see, that could happen to anyone of us. Paul warns us, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.” (1 Cor. 10:12).

Basically, we need to recognize how the enemy, the devil, operates. He is cunning. He makes surprise attacks. He attacks us when we are most vulnerable. So, James also warns us, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8).

I remember years and years ago, when I felt God was calling me to become a missionary. I quit my job and I was hoping that God would provide for my plane fare and tuition fee to attend the missionary training school. I prayed, of course, but as the deadline for paying the tuition fee approached and no money was in sight, I became worried. When I was alone, my mind played tricks on me because I was like hearing “God doesn’t love you, God doesn’t love you” over and over again. I nearly became depressed, but God sent a friend who encouraged me. And I realized that the devil was planting seeds of doubt in my mind.

Folks, the battle starts in the mind. The enemy messes with our minds. If your mind constantly dwells on negativism and defeat, then the enemy takes advantage of that and fuels the fire, so to speak. Until you fall into depression and, like Elijah, you just wish you would die. But I hope you don’t get to the point of saying, “I have had enough, Lord”.

What do you then to not get to that point? Let me now share with you **three things you should do to win the battle of the mind.**

1. Keep in mind that God can strengthen and revive you.

Let me read from verse 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.

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.”

These verses give us a picture of a loving and caring God. God knew what was going on in the mind of Elijah. Not only in his mind but in his body as well. Elijah had been on the run. First, from Jezreel where Ahab and Jezebel lived, he went to Beersheba which is in the southern part of Judah and the distance is about 100 miles. That’s like from here to Richmond. I used to travel to Richmond when I was working at DMV. It took me one-and-a-half hours of driving. And I was tired after driving. Imagine, he just ran. And his servant ran with him. But, of course, they stopped every now and then. When he arrived in Richmond, he ran again but without his servant anymore who I guess, gave up, until he reached the wilderness. We don’t know the distance but it was a day’s worth of running. No wonder, after praying that he would die, he fell asleep. He must be very, very tired and exhausted.

God had compassion on him. He sends an angel who wakes him up in order to give him food and drink and then he sleeps again. The Lord let him have a good sleep and sends an angel again who gave him food and drink again. So, God strengthened and revived him.

Do you believe in angels? I do believe. The Bible says that they are ministering agents of God. They deliver a message like when Angel Gabriel spoke to Mary about the baby Jesus and they also protect and provide.

Let me share with you once again our family’s experience with an angel. Some of you haven’t heard this. This happened years ago when we were still living in Sterling and Eza was just 3 years old. I’ll quote from my sermon before:

Well, it happened last Wednesday around lunch time. I was at work and Anabel called me on my cell. The first words she said were, “Rolly, Eza fell on the stairs outside the house.” I immediately felt alarmed knowing that the stairs were concrete but her next words calmed me down. “But she’s all right.”

Then, she narrated what happened. What happened was that all of them were walking along the porch toward the stairs and to the car, with Nanay Monet and Eza leading the way. Eza already knows how to get down the stairs. She normally holds the railing on the side and slowly steps down with Nanay or Anabel or myself beside her just in case.

"Now, as Eza was getting close to the edge, she suddenly looked back probably because she looked for Anabel who just closed the door. As she looked back while still walking, her left foot missed the first step. Now, what do you think would happen? You would imagine she would tumble down head first, right?"

According to Nanay Monet, Eza’s body never touched the steps of the stairs and she saw her turned around like an acrobat, or like a diver doing a somersault and most amazing of all, everything happened in slo-mo. She testified that it was like watching a slo-mo replay in boxing or basketball. Ally was behind them and saw what happened too. She said to Anabel, 'Mommy, Eza floated. And her body turned crazy. Then she fell to the ground slowly'. In the car, Eze who saw it too, prayed and said, 'Lord, thank you for sending an angel to save Eza.'

I wish it was caught on video. But with video or not, I believe an angel caught Eza and perhaps, because Eza was a bit heavy, the angel had a hard time keeping her steady that’s why her body bounced around until the angel was able to put her down slowly.

There's absolutely no natural explanation for that. Three members of my family were witnesses to the fact. The only thing I can say is that God loves little children. After church, a few folks came to me and told me of how God protected them or someone they knew when they were children as well.

God is amazing! He says, "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:27 NIV)

Folks, when you're weary and afraid, you can trust that God will take care of you. He knows the troubles you've seen and why you're running away and why you're afraid and he is there with you. You just don't see him but he watches over you. He knows your heartaches and longs to strengthen you and revive your spirit.

The Bible says in **Isaiah 40:29-31**, "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 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."

Let me encourage you: Don't give up because God will not give up on you. Are you afraid or you're worried so much about something? God says to you, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:10) Are you hurting, physically or emotionally? The Bible says, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." (Psalm 147:3) Maybe you want to give up because you've done something in the past you're not proud of. God specializes in forgiveness. He can wipe the slate clean for you. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Just remember that God is always faithful. He will strengthen you and revive you. The next thing you can do to deal with your frustrations and disappointments is to

2. Remind yourself that God is always ready to listen.

So, Elijah's final destination is Mount Horeb. This is the same mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. There, he hid inside a cave and spent the night. Looks like he still felt defeated despite the strength he received from God. That's what usually happens when you're so depressed. You don't want to see or talk to anybody. You just want to hide inside your shell. At this point, Elijah hadn't talked to God about what was in his heart and in his mind. God knew, of course. But God wants to have a conversation with him. So, God initiates the conversation.

Let's look at the second part of verse 9, "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.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 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.”

It seems that Elijah is even directing his anger and frustration to God. Have you ever felt that way? Like after serving God and obeying his instructions to you then you experience a devastating loss for example? Maybe you become a missionary in the jungle and then your wife or kids suffer a debilitating disease or even die? That must be heartbreaking, isn't it? I don't know how I would feel if that happened to me.

But folks, like Elijah, you can pour out your heart to God, too. Your frustrations, anxieties, fears, unmet expectations, disappointments, anger, anything, you can vent it out to God. God will listen. He is your heavenly Father. He loves you more than you know. He is eager to listen to you.

King David himself sometimes questions God. Like in Psalm 10 where he begins with, “Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1) In my case, I remember the time when I thought that God wanted me to go back as a missionary to Russia after having been there a few months before. So, I eagerly contacted my missions leader and other co-missionaries to tell them that I would be going back with them and I was already preparing. Problem is, I couldn't raise funds for my trip. Somehow, I just couldn't. No one supported me. The door closed and I didn't go. I was deeply frustrated and took it hard and I said to God, “God, you don't know what you're doing.”

Of course, I asked forgiveness for saying those words. But I know God never took it against me. He knew my frustration. He knew what was going on inside of me.

Keep in mind that God can strengthen and revive you. Remind yourself that he is ready to listen. And

3. Remember God has great plans for you.

Let's look now at our remaining verses, "15 The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. 16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. 17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. 18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

So, after he poured out his heart to God, Elijah received good news. God revealed his plan for his life. He was to anoint two kings and also anoint his successor. These three men would be the ones who would execute judgment on idolaters in Israel. And to top it off, God surprised him with the fact that there were 7000 Israelites who were deeply loyal to God. I'm sure that blew his mind. Now, God is messing with his mind. In a good way.

What do we learn here? No matter what you're going through, just hang on. The story is not finished yet. God is a master of surprises. He has great plans for your life. Though it may seem bleak at the moment for you, God has figured it all out. And in the right moment, in his own time, you will know why God is allowing these things to happen to you. In the end, this is for your own good and for his glory.

Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."