

Free to Rest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 2:1–12, 1 Kings 18, 1 Kings 19:1–8, Matt. 5:1–3, Isa. 53:4–6, 2 Kings 2:11.*

Memory Text: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (*Ps. 27:1, NKJV*).

Many of the people Jesus encountered in His earthly ministry were sick, sometimes even unto death. They thronged to Jesus for healing and for rest from their sufferings. And they always received it too.

Sometimes He just spoke a word, and they were fully recovered. Sometimes He touched the sick, and, miraculously, they were healed. Sometimes He sent them off, and healing took place as they went on their way. Jesus healed men, women, children, Jews, non-Jews, rich people, and poor, unassuming people. The worst cases of leprosy and blindness were not beyond His reach. Indeed, He even healed those with the worst “sickness” of all—death.

This week, we look at two very different examples of healing. In the one, the sufferer was so ill that he could not even come to Jesus on his own. His symptoms were clearly visible to everyone. In the other case, there were no obvious visible symptoms. In both cases, healing came in God's time and way.

As we explore the topic of rest from pain and suffering, we also will contemplate the question that all of us, at some point or another in our Christian walk, have experienced. What happens when our prayers for healing aren't answered?

How do we find rest then?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 21.

Healing Rest

If ever there is a time that we need rest, it is when we are sick. We need physical rest so that our bodies can rally our immune systems.

Often we need mental rest too. Sometimes the sickness is just something non-life-threatening, such as a cold or a migraine. We lie there and try not to think about all that we should be doing but simply can't.

Sometimes, when it is something potentially life-threatening, we lie awake and worry about what the medical test results will be. And then often we start to wonder why. Has that unhealthy lifestyle finally caught up with us? Was it the drugs we took 20 years ago? Was it the extra weight we have been carrying for the past few years? Is God punishing us for that secret sin that no one else knows about?

Read Mark 2:1–4. What was happening here?

For the paralytic in this story, it was an obvious case. In *The Desire of Ages* (pp. 267–271), we get the background. The paralytic had done some things that he was not very proud of. His sinful life caused this sickness, and the spiritual experts drew a straight line from cause to effect. He had brought this disease upon himself by his sins, and there was no cure.

This attitude can be very typical. We often seem to be obsessed with *who did it*. If some crime has been committed, someone must pay for it. If there is an accident somewhere, someone should be sued. But assigning blame does not bring healing or wholeness to the one who is sick.

God's original design did not include pain, disease, and suffering. Sickness came to this planet only with the entrance of sin. That's why God gives us health guidelines—so that we can enjoy a better quality of life now. But as long as we are in this sin-sick world, there will be no guarantees of health, no matter how diligently we follow healthful principles.

The good news is that God can give us rest whether we are sick or healthy, whether our sickness is our own doing or a result of someone else's neglect, our genes, or just a by-product of living in this sinful world. God knows how to give us rest.

When someone gets sick, it's not good to start assigning blame. At the same time, why can understanding the cause of a sickness be, in some cases, a crucial step toward healing and recovery?

Root Treatment

The paralytic had been lowered into Jesus' presence, and all eyes were on Jesus. Would He choose to heal an obvious sinner? Would He speak a word to rebuke the illness?

How did Jesus go about healing the paralytic? What was the first thing Jesus did for him? Read Mark 2:5–12.

Because we are often unaware of a disease until we notice the symptoms, we often think of the disease as merely the symptoms. We think that getting rid of the symptoms means healing. Jesus approaches disease differently. He knows the root of all suffering and disease and wants to treat this first.

In the case of the paralytic, instead of immediately treating the obvious effects of his disease, Jesus went straight to the root of what was bothering the man the most. The paralytic felt the weight of his guilt and separation from God more severely than he felt his disease. A person resting in God is able to endure whatever physical suffering may befall him in this sin-sick world. And so, Jesus goes straight to the root and offers forgiveness first.

The religious leaders were shocked when they heard Jesus pronounce forgiveness. In answer to their unspoken accusations, Jesus posed a question.

Read Mark 2:8, 9. What challenge was Jesus giving to the scribes there? What issue was He really dealing with?

Talk is generally cheap—but not when God speaks. By God's powerful word, all things came into being (*Genesis 1*). Although forgiveness is not something that we can see, it is costly. Forgiveness cost the life of the Son of God on the cross. Everything else is secondary. To demonstrate the power and reality of forgiveness, Jesus then chose to heal the paralytic.

God wants to cure us on the inside first. And then sometimes He chooses to bring us immediate physical healing, as with the paralytic, or sometimes we will have to wait for resurrection morning to experience physical healing. Either way, our Savior wants us to be able to rest in the assurance of His love and grace and forgiveness even now, even amid our suffering.

How can we find rest and peace, even when our prayers for healing are not answered, at least for now?

Running Away

Based on data from the World Health Organization (WHO), the most common illness worldwide, affecting more than three hundred million people each year, does not always have obvious visible symptoms. Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide and is a major contributor to the global burden of disease.

Unfortunately, often depression is not spoken about in Christianity because it can be seen as a sign of a lack of faith. After all, aren't Christians always supposed to be filled with joy and happiness and the like? So, isn't depression a sign that something is wrong with our relationship with God?

Most people know that this isn't true. Even Christians, faithful Christians, can at times struggle with depression, especially after a traumatic event, and it is not a sign of lack of faith or trust in God. Again, one can read the Psalms and see the pain, suffering, and anguish that God's faithful people suffered.

Sometimes a depression slowly and quietly takes hold of us, and we recognize it only when it tightens its grip. Sometimes it strikes quickly, after a particularly draining emotional or physical event. For example, God's faithful prophet Elijah was completely drained, emotionally and physically, after Mount Carmel.

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah had just seen God's miracle of fire coming down from heaven. In answer to his prayer, he had seen rain come and end a three-year drought. Why did Elijah react to Jezebel's threat by running? Read 1 Kings 19:1–5.

Elijah had a very grueling 24 hours. This experience, coupled with a rude awakening and a death threat, served as a depression trigger for Elijah. Also, Elijah was there when the prophets of Baal were slaughtered, perhaps even some of them by his own hand (*1 Kings 18:40*). Such an event, even for a righteous cause, can easily lead to traumatic stress in those who either watch or, even worse, take part.

So Elijah began to run, to try to get away. Sometimes we run to the refrigerator and try to eat ourselves happy again. Sometimes we try to sleep our emotional exhaustion away. Sometimes we look for a new relationship, job, or location in our quest to run away. And sometimes we bury ourselves in more work, more deadlines, and appointments, as we try harder to run away from the nameless something that is draining our joy and rest. And of course, many people use "medications" of some sort or another, all in an attempt to dull the pain. In the end, though, these things only mask the symptoms; they don't solve the problem, and often they can only make it worse.

Too Tired to Run

Elijah was too tired to run anymore. And so, he prayed again. This prayer was very different from the faith-filled prayer that God answered on Mount Carmel (*1 Kings 18:36, 37*) in front of the priests and prophets of Baal, the members of the court, and the common people. This was a simple, short prayer of desperation.

In 1 Kings 19:4, Elijah stated that he was no better than his fathers. What was he talking about?

When Elijah finally was still, guilt came crushing in on him. He realized that his quick exit had hijacked what could have been a great opportunity for reformation in Israel. He realized that he had disappointed those who needed him. And he was powerless to do anything about it. Thus, in a painful moment of self-reflection, knowing full well the history of his people, he saw himself for what he really was.

That can be a painful revelation for anyone of us, can't it—that is, seeing ourselves for what we really are? How grateful we should be for the promise that, sinful as our lives have been, in Christ, God will see us as He sees Jesus. What more hope can we have than that, by faith, we can claim for ourselves the righteousness of Christ? (*See Phil. 3:9.*)

Nevertheless, depression has a way of sucking us into a dark whirlpool of self-loathing. And sometimes we begin to think that death is the only way out.

This seemed to be the case for Elijah. It was all too much for him. He said, “‘It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!’” (*1 Kings 19:4, NKJV*).

The good news is that the great Healer didn't condemn Elijah. God understands better than we do what we are up against as we fight depression.

“We may have no remarkable evidence at the time that the face of our Redeemer is bending over us in compassion and love, but this is even so. We may not feel His visible touch, but His hand is upon us in love and pitying tenderness.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 97.

God knows and understands that “the journey is too much” (*1 Kings 19:7, NIV*) for us, but sometimes He has to wait until we stop running. Then He can intervene.

Sometimes people who are drowning become so confused that they will fight a lifeguard off. The lifeguard then has to back off and wait to perform a rescue until the victim actually becomes unconscious.

What hopes and comfort can you find from the following texts: Psalm 34:18, Matthew 5:1–3, Psalm 73:26, Isaiah 53:4–6?

Rest and More

God knew that all the running had made Elijah tired. God knew that more than being physically tired, Elijah was emotionally tired and carrying a tremendous load of guilt. As Jesus would do for the paralytic so many years later, God wiped the slate clean and provided rest for Elijah. Finally, he could really sleep and be refreshed.

We would expect this to be the end of the story, but it isn't. God's rest is not a one-time event. Entering into God's rest has to do with healing—with slowly unlearning negative thought patterns and destructive habits. God does not rush healing.

Read 1 Kings 19:5–8. Where was Elijah going now, and why?

After rest, Elijah was running again. But this time God reoriented his running. God understands that life in this sinful world can and will cause depression. He understands our impulse to run, but He wants to redirect our running. Instead of all the self-destructive coping mechanisms we try, He wants us to run to Him. And once we start running to Him, He wants to teach us to listen for the “still small voice” (*1 Kings 19:12, NKJV*) that will give us rest.

Elijah had no energy to lift himself up and make the journey to meet God. God provided the energy for the meeting, and God promised a better tomorrow.

As Elijah lay under his broom tree and wished to die, he believed that his best days were over.

Read 1 Kings 19:15, 16 and 2 Kings 2:11. What was still in store for Elijah?

God knew that better days lay ahead for Elijah. Healing would come for the prophet as he would learn to regulate his life by God's rhythms and accept His rest. There were still kings to be anointed and a successor to be chosen. God already knew about Elisha, who would become as close as a son to Elijah. God knew that in faith Elijah would again call down fire from heaven (*2 Kings 1:10*). For Elijah, there would be no desperate death under a broom tree, but rather a fiery chariot ride to heavenly rest.

What can we learn from the story of Elijah about why, no matter how bad we feel, in God's strength we must still seek not to give up?

Further Thought: “With the continual change of circumstances, changes come in our experience; and by these changes we are either elated or depressed. But the change of circumstances has no power to change God’s relation to us. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and He asks us to have unquestioning confidence in His love.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 120.

“Keep looking unto Jesus, offering up silent prayers in faith, taking hold of His strength, whether you have any manifest feeling or not. Go right forward as if every prayer offered was lodged in the throne of God and responded to by the One whose promises never fail. Go right along, singing and making melody to God in your hearts, even when depressed by a sense of weight and sadness. I tell you as one who knows, light will come, joy will be ours, and the mists and clouds will be rolled back. And we pass from the oppressive power of the shadow and darkness into the clear sunshine of His presence.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 242, 243.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 It is often very difficult to help someone suffering from mental disorders or depression. What would be a good strategy for your church to learn how to minister more effectively to those affected by depression?
- 2 We often struggle to be open and honest before God. Scan through some psalms and see how open and honest the biblical authors were before God. How can we foster an atmosphere of openness and honesty in our local congregation?
- 3 Prayer is often difficult when we face depression. Discuss the power of intercessory prayer for those who cannot pray for themselves.
- 4 Why is it so important that we remember that faith is not feeling? Just because we are depressed, discouraged, fearful, and worried doesn’t mean we lack faith or trust in God. It means only that, for the moment, we are depressed, discouraged, fearful, and worried, as all of us have been at some point or another. How can we learn that, at times like this, reaching out in faith is so crucial, no matter how difficult it may seem?
- 5 What great hope can you take from the story of the paralytic, especially if a sinful lifestyle has brought disease and sickness upon you?

Better Than Toys

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Several friends gathered around Mariah at school on Monday.

“What are you doing after school?” one asked.

“Can we come over to your house to play?” said another.

Mariah shook her head. “I have so much to do today,” she said.

Nine-year-old Mariah was a busy girl in Pond Inlet, a small town located on an isolated island in the Canadian Arctic. Every weekday she went to school and did her homework. She also helped her parents around the house. On Sabbath, her family read the Bible and watched online sermons at home.

But Mariah’s friends really wanted to play with her. On Tuesday, the children gathered around her again, and on Thursday and Friday.

“But when can we come over to your house to play?” a friend asked.

“How about Saturday?” said another. “You must have time on Saturday.”

Mariah’s eyes lit up. She did have free time on Saturday. “You can come over to my house and join our Bible study on Saturday,” she said.

Her friends looked confused. They had never read the Bible. But they wanted to spend time with Mariah, so they agreed to come over on Saturday.

On Sabbath, a few friends showed up at Mariah’s house. As Mariah read from the Bible, they looked confused. They had never heard about the God of the Bible. They again looked confused when Father turned on an online sermon. They had never heard a sermon, and they did not understand the Adventist preacher. Afterward, they asked Mariah to explain.

“What did he mean when he said that?” one asked.

“Or what about when he spoke about that?” said another.

Mariah tried to explain the sermon and to simplify it. When she finished, her friends seemed to understand what she was attempting to say.

At school on Monday, several classmates asked Mariah’s friends what they had done at Mariah’s house on Saturday. “We read about God in the Bible,” answered one.

“And we watched an interesting sermon,” said another.

The classmates had never read the Bible or watched a sermon, and they wanted to know more. Mariah’s friends explained what they learned. Mariah smiled as she listened. She felt good. This was better than playing with toys. She would welcome her classmates into her home every Sabbath.



Part of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a church and community services center to share God in the Canadian territory of Nunavut, where Mariah lives. Thank you for planning a generous offering.