

Sometimes things don’t work out like I hoped they would, and I feel disappointed. Sometimes something I worked on doesn’t turn out as well as I thought it would, or something I was hoping for doesn’t pan out. And I feel disappointed.

Does that ever happen to you? What are the things that make you feel disappointed? Maybe you worked really hard on something, but others didn’t appreciate it. Maybe you had a great idea and others didn’t go along with it. Maybe you had a picture of how an event would go and it just didn’t turn out that way.

Or maybe your disappointment is something different. Maybe you think, “5 years ago or 10 years ago, I thought by now I would be farther ahead in my finances or at my job.” And you feel disappointed.

How do we deal with disappointment? It’s important that we answer this question because if we don’t deal with disappointment, then we can become bitter and isolated. We can lash out at others and stray away from God.

One time the Prophet Elijah felt disappointed. And when we see how God helped him, I think it can also help us. Our Bible passage today comes from 1 Kings chapter 19.

When we meet Elijah in 1 Kings chapter 19, Elijah was feeling disappointed. And that’s a little surprising because Elijah had just had the greatest victory of his life. Our passage for today comes shortly after the contest on Mount Carmel. You might know the story. King Ahab and his wife Jezebel had introduced Baal worship in Israel. Elijah set up a contest to prove who was the true God. The prophets of Baal put a sacrifice on their altar and asked Baal to send fire. Of course, no fire came. Elijah put a sacrifice on the altar to the LORD and prayed, “LORD please let these people know that you are God.” And fire fell from heaven. And all the people fell on their faces and cried out “The LORD – he is God! The LORD – he is God!” Even King Ahab saw it! And Elijah was probably feeling very optimistic.¹

But then Jezebel sent him a message that said that she was going to kill him. And Elijah’s mood quickly changed from one of optimism to one of despair. He ran away and he sat down under a broom tree and he prayed that he would die. An angel gave him some food and he traveled forty days and forty nights until he came to Mount Sinai. He went into a cave and that’s where we meet him in our passage today.

And God said to him, “**What are you doing here Elijah?**” (1 Kings 19:9) Do you have a certain place in your house where you go when you are frustrated? Maybe you go into room by yourself and close the door. What if God were to come to you at a time like that and say to you, “Why are you here? Why are you in the place where you usually go when something is frustrating you?” What is God giving you an opportunity to do? He’s giving you a chance to pour out your frustration.

And that’s exactly what Elijah does. “**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.**” (1 Kings 19:10). I recently heard someone commenting on this story and he made a good observation: Does it ever happen to you that when you are disappointed with something, you portray things as worse than they actually are? Here Elijah portrays things as worse than they actually are. Elijah was not the only one left. God tells him that at the end of our lesson, “**Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him**” (1 Kings 19:18). There was not one left. There were seven thousand left.

And Elijah knew that he was not the only one left. He probably didn’t know all seven thousand, but in the chapter before this Elijah talked with a man named Obadiah. And Obadiah told Elijah, “I fear the LORD very

¹ See Walter Maier III, *1 Kings 12-22*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), 1449 n.56.

much. And I hid one hundred prophets of the LORD in caves and I would supply them with food.” So Elijah knew he wasn’t the only one left.

So then why did Elijah say he was the only one left? He wasn’t consciously lying to the LORD. It’s just that when we are disappointed, we tend to portray the situation as worse than it actually is. Think of the last time you were really frustrated and disappointed. Did you make any extreme statements that weren’t actually true? The problem with that is that when we make extreme statements, when we portray things as worse than they actually are, we miss the good things that God is doing. Elijah was so focused on his disappointment that he missed a great thing that God was doing. In the midst of extreme societal pressures for Baal worship, God was preserving seven thousand faithful believers. Here’s my point: Don’t let disappointment cause you to miss the good things that God is doing.

The good things God is doing might not be flashy. They might not be the things we hoped for. But it’s helpful if we understand something about the way God works. God wanted to illustrate this for Elijah and so he told Elijah to stand at the entrance of the cave, for the LORD was about to pass by. Then there was a great and mighty wind. It says that the wind **“tore the mountains apart” (19:11)**. Can you imagine that? A wind so strong it tears mountains apart? And then there was an earthquake and a fire. But the LORD was not in those things. And then there was a **“gentle whisper” (19:12)**. What was the LORD trying to teach Elijah? I heard it explained this way once: God *can* work through great displays of power. He did that on Mount Carmel when he sent down the fire. But his usual way of operating is through the gentle whisper of his word.²

Through the gentle whisper of his Word, God comes to you when you are disappointed and reassures you, **“I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11)**. God comes to us in his Word and reminds us that he loves us and that he sent his Son Jesus to die for us.

And if we say to ourselves, “What about all of the evil that I see in the world?”, God says in his Word that someday he is going to come and judge evil. God promised Elijah that he was going to judge the wickedness in Israel. He told Elijah, **“Anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel” (1 Kings 19:16)**. Jehu would be God’s instrument of judgment on the wicked house of Ahab, including Jezebel who had sought Elijah’s life. We experience evil in this world. But on the last day Jesus is going to come and judge evil and bring his believers to the glory of heaven. When God delivers us on the last day we will not be disappointed. God said in Isaiah, **“Those who hope in me will not be disappointed” (Isaiah 49:23)**.³

Another way God’s Word helps us when we are feeling disappointed is it tells us to link up with other believers who will give us strength. One of those other believers who would help Elijah was Elisha. God told Elijah, **“Anoint Elisha ... to succeed you as prophet” (1 Kings 19:17)**.

After Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, the gentle whisper of God’s Word continued through the ministry of Elisha and others. And the gentle whisper of God’s Word continues to this very day. It created believers like you and believers like me. Don’t miss the good things God is doing through the gentle whisper of his Word.

Elijah’s disappointment caused him to miss the good things that God was doing. Don’t let the same happen to you. Instead of focusing on our disappointments, focus on the good things God is doing through the gentle whisper of his word. I’ll give you some examples. Maybe you are having a terrible day, but at the end of it you get to sit and read your Meditations. And those Meditations give you peace. Or maybe your kids have been crazy all day, but there are a few golden moments when your child sits on your lap and you read them a Bible

² I owe this point to Professor Thomas Nass at the Summer Hebrew Institute at Martin Luther College.

³ Reference found with biblegateway.com.

story. Or think about here at church. We are not a perfect church, but through the gentle whisper of his Word God is doing good things in people's hearts and lives.

What would it be like if instead of being consumed by our disappointments, we would pay more attention to the good things God is doing through the gentle whisper of his Word in our personal lives and in our families and in our church? Think of what that would do to our general mood. Think of what that would do to our interactions with our spouses and family and fellow church members. If we focus on and look for the good things God is doing, then wouldn't we be more positive in all of our interactions? Wouldn't we be more eager to hear more of the gentle whisper of God in his Word?

Don't let disappointments distract you from the good things God is doing. God is doing good things through the gentle whisper of his word. Pay attention to that, because we have a God who doesn't disappoint. Amen.