The prophet Elijah is one of the most interesting and colorful people in the Bible, and God used him during an important time in Israel’s history to oppose a wicked king and bring revival to the land. Elijah’s ministry marked the beginning of the end of Baal worship in Israel. Elijah’s life was filled with turmoil. At times he was bold and decisive, and at other times fearful and tentative. He alternately demonstrates victory and defeat, followed by recovery. Elijah knew both the power of God and the depths of depression.

Elijah, a prophet of God whose name means “my God is the Lord,” came from Tishbeh in Gilead, but nothing is known of his family or birth. We first meet Elijah in [1 Kings 17:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%2017.1) when he suddenly appears to challenge Ahab, an evil king who ruled the northern kingdom from 874 to 853 BC. Elijah prophesies a drought to come upon the whole land as consequence for Ahab’s evil ([1 Kings 17:1–7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%2017.1%E2%80%937)). Warned by God, Elijah hides near the brook of Cherith where he is fed by ravens. As the drought and famine in the land deepen, Elijah meets with a widow in a neighboring country, and, through her obedience to Elijah’s request, God provides food enough for Elijah, the woman, and her son. Miraculously, the widow’s barrel of flour and jar of oil never run out ([1 Kings 17:8–16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%2017.8%E2%80%9316)).

We next see Elijah as the central character in a face-off with the prophets of the false god Baal on [Mount Carmel](https://www.gotquestions.org/mount-Carmel.html) ([1 Kings 18:17-40](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%2018.17-40)). The prophets of Baal call upon their god all day long to rain fire from heaven to no avail. Then Elijah builds an altar of stones, digs a ditch around it, puts the sacrifice on the top of wood and calls for water to be poured over his sacrifice three times. Elijah calls upon God, and God sends fire down from heaven, burns the sacrifice, the wood, and the stones and licks up the water in the ditch. God proved He was more powerful than false gods. It was then that Elijah and the people killed all of the false prophets of Baal, in compliance with God’s command in [Deuteronomy 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut%2013.5).  
  
After the great victory over the false prophets, rain once again fell on the land ([1 Kings 18:41-46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%2018.41-46)). However, in spite of victory, Elijah entered a period of wavering faith and depression ([1 Kings 19:1-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%2019.1-18)). Ahab had told his wife, Jezebel, of God’s display of power. Rather than turn to God, Jezebel vowed to kill Elijah. Hearing of this, Elijah fled to the wilderness, where he prayed for God to take his life.  And this is where we meet him during our reading for today.

If we are going to be honest. Elijah is depressed. And one of the reasons that he is depressed is because what he expected to happen did not happen. False worship was rampant all over Israel since Solomon allowed his many wives to worship their false idols and provided places for them to worship and eventually this trickled down into the people.

And when the nation of Israel splits into two matters just get worse because King Jeroboam under the guise of convenience builds places to worship golden calves in Dan and Bethel and all over the northern kingdom.

And God commissions Elijah to turn the people away from this idol worship. And as I said Elijah goes up against over 400 prophets of Baal. And Baal is considered a sky god and so to call out Baal in this type of way to call down fire from heaven is really telling. That if the sky god cant do this and Yahweh can, then Yahweh is the true God. Yahweh is greater than Baal and deserves your true and sincere worship. And after doing all that he could to turn the people away from Baal and killing the prophets and all the witnesses he expected to probably be done with this battle. He probably expected everyone including Ahab and Jezebel to turn to the Lord and things to be easy.

And the exact opposite happens. Elijah is threatened, and he is exasperated. He sees no end in sight, and he is mentally worn out. He doesn’t want to keep living and asks God to take his life. In his eyes it would be easier to die than to keep on living.

And what is amazing in the story is the way God responds to Elijah, in such a tender caring way. God sends an angel, His messenger to Elijah to talk to him and encourage him to eat and get some rest. And this is important because we must understand that mental health is important. And I know this is not a typical message, but we need to understand as a church the importance of mental health and be a part of the solution to destigmatize it. Especially when we observe the way God responds to Elijah.

God does not say toughen up, God does not say its no big deal, God provides for comfort and rest and peace as well as protection. Elijah is in the wilderness he is not in a home and yet he does not fear attack, he is able to rest and then eat when the angel prompts him. IF Elijah, this great prophet who goes on to be taken up into heaven and have such a strong spirit that Elisha asks for a double portion is able to get depressed and mentally worn out, we are not exempt.

And when we are in this position we need to get help. If you are depressed or mentally worn out, you must get help, it is imperative that you get help. You can talk to me for spiritual advice and then we can get you to a professional and attack this on mental and spiritual fronts.

To put this into more perspective, the suicide rate in children before the pandemic was at an all time high, and it has only increased. According to[a report by the CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm), “Beginning in April 2020, the proportion of children’s mental health–related ED visits among all pediatric ED visits increased and remained elevated through October. Compared with 2019, the proportion of mental health–related visits for children aged 5–11 and 12–17 years increased approximately 24%. and 31%, respectively”[8].

Over the past 20 years the suicide rate in this country has been steadily increasing. In 2018, there were an estimated 1.4 million suicide attempts and more than [48,000 deaths by suicide](https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics), making it the [tenth leading cause of death](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/leading-causes-of-death.htm) in the United States. Firearms were involved in [half of all suicides](https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics), and there were more than [twice](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml) as many deaths by suicide than by homicide.

Mental health disorders and substance use disorders are the most [significant risk factors](https://doi.org/10.1111/sltb.12422) for suicidal behaviors. In addition, [environmental factors](https://afsp.org/risk-factors-and-warning-signs) such as stressful life events may increase the risk of suicide.  And SC is above the country average in that more people complete suicide here than most states.

This is important and people need to know we see them and care about them. You need to know that we see you and we care about you and that you are not alone. Elijah is depressed, he wants to die and God sends someone to comfort him and make sure that he is okay.

And if we know anyone in a similar situation we have to do the same thing, every life is precious. We must let people know their true self worth and their true identity.

From a spiritual perspective there is great research that shows that Compared with women who never participated in religious services, women who attended any religious service once a week or more were five times less likely to commit suicide. We must address the mental aspect and spiritual aspect. Having a relationship with God does not immune us from these thoughts as we see with Elijah, but it does help out in how many people attempted to take their own lives. This is another reason why it is important to share our faith with those around us. Faith is important for every aspect of our lives including mental health.

Suicide is not inevitable for anyone. By starting the conversation, providing support, and directing help to those who need it, we can prevent suicides and save lives.

Evidence shows that providing support services, talking about suicide, reducing access to means of self-harm, and following up with loved ones are just some of the actions we can all take to help others.

These are the steps I came across that are helpful.

If you are worried that someone you know may be feeling suicidal, rather than wondering if your concerns are true, it is OK to reach out and simply ask, are they thinking about suicide. Being direct, without judgment, may open the door for a deeper conversation about how they are feeling. Studies have shown that having this conversation actually reduces suicidal ideation and does not increase suicidal thoughts.

Reducing or removing access to lethal items or a ‘chosen method’ of suicide is an important step in prevention. This involves asking the person if they have a plan or method they have considered using and asking if they have already tried something to harm themselves. Knowing these details can help you learn how severe the risk is and remove their predetermined path of choice.

You can connect with someone in a variety of ways. Being physically present is an obvious method but may not always be an option for you. Take care and do not over commit. Connecting by phone or in any other way that shows support for that person is helpful. If you are not able to be present and supportive, talk with them about others that may be

Hook them up with resources that are available during a crisis, 24/7 to establish a safety net. Ask if they are they seeing a mental health professional and connect them with resources and support in their community.

After you have asked if they are considering suicide, removed access to dangerous or lethal items, connected them to a support network and resources it is important to follow up. You can check-in and continue to show your support with a phone call, sending a text message, send them a letter or card, stop by their home for a visit, or connect through email. Regular follow up can help them feel less isolated and potentially reduce their risk of suicide.  
I know this was not your typical sermon, but if we cant talk about it here and now and in the church, how are we going to be a vessel through which God can use to save lives. And I felt it important to talk about because you never know who needs to hear that God loves them and you never know who has a family member or friend that they could help save their life with this information. Because this is serious in our country and in our state.

And as we saw with how God reacted and treated Elijah we know that God takes this seriously. Because God provided comfort, provided care, and provided an encounter with him that Elijah needed and then followed up by letting Elijah anoint Jehu who is going to be the one to complete Elijahs task and rid Baal worship from the land for a season. God cares about mental health and so do we.