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 worshipper 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

- Fatigue
- Depression
- Emotions

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

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 flip chart or whiteboard at the front of the room, starting with the ones in the lesson and adding others the group suggests.

In another column list negative strategies people use to deal with bad feelings—such as drugs, alcohol, overeating, violence toward others, negative talk, self-harm, etc.

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. Which list of strategies is easier to do when we’re feeling bad (often, it will be the negative ones). Which list 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.

The climb up to the top of a roller coaster is nerve-wracking but exciting. The car teeters for a moment at the top, then begins the long plunge downward. That’s when the screaming starts. Some riders might scream in excitement and others in fear, but very few people stay calm and quiet when a roller coaster is hurtling to the bottom of the ride.

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, few people scream with 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 whiteboard or flip chart 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, etc. 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 strategies 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, etc. 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

### Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **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 read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.

www.cornerstoneconnections.net
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.
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, pp. 164, 165).

keytext

“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)
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
___ Watching TV or movies
___ Talking to a parent, counselor, pastor, or other caring adult
___ Doing something for someone else
___ Other: ____________________

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, broken 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)

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 par-

The Bible doesn’t promise that God’s people will never know unhappiness or discour-

agament. 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.
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).

other eyes

“Now it may surprise you to learn that in His efforts to get permanent possession of a soul, [God] relies on the troughs even more than the peaks; some of His special favourites have gone through longer and deeper troughs than anyone else. . . . He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles.”—C. S. Lewis, 20th-century British writer, in The Screwtape Letters.
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
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
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
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
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
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#.UTkF1H80OaE. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.