

Research Brief: 1 Kings 19:1–18 — Elijah after Carmel

Prepared as a working sample. A paid brief looks exactly like this: your passage's load-bearing beats, two verified true stories that carry them, an honest accounting of where each parallel breaks, and every fact traced to a named source.

What this passage is actually doing

Most illustration databases tag this passage “depression” or “burnout” and hand you any story about being tired. But the passage has a specific structure, and an illustration that misses it will feel vaguely apt instead of true. The load-bearing beats:

1. The collapse comes *immediately after the greatest triumph* — Carmel first, Jezebel's threat second. This is not the despair of failure; it is the despair that follows victory.
2. Flight and self-isolation — Elijah leaves even his servant behind and goes a day into the wilderness alone (v. 3–4).
3. The despair is voiced plainly: “I have had enough, LORD. Take my life” (v. 4). Scripture does not soften it.
4. God's first response is physical, not theological — sleep, bread, water, touch, twice (v. 5–8) — and when the word does come, it comes as a low whisper, not the wind, earthquake, or fire (v. 11–12).
5. Restoration ends in recommission and de-isolation: anoint Elisha, and “I reserve seven thousand in Israel” — you are not the only one left (v. 15–18).

Story One — Michael Phelps: the collapse after the podium

By the close of the 2012 London Games, Michael Phelps was the most decorated Olympian in history — 22 medals. What followed his triumphs was not celebration but a pattern of post-Olympic depression he later said stretched back to 2004. It bottomed out in the fall of 2014: after a second DUI arrest, Phelps shut himself in his bedroom for four days, barely eating or sleeping. His own words, on record: “I was in a really dark place. Not wanting to be alive anymore.” That October he checked into The Meadows, a treatment center in Arizona, for a 45-day stay. The turn was unglamorous — therapy, family reconciliation with his father, daily structure. He returned to the pool and won five golds and a silver in Rio 2016, but the recommission that matters came after: he has spent the years since as one of the most visible mental-health advocates in sports, executive-producing HBO's *The Weight of Gold* and telling the Kennedy Forum, “I am extremely thankful that I did not take my life.”

Beat map

Passage beat	Carry	In the story
Collapse after triumph	Strong	The darkest stretch followed his most decorated point, not a defeat — the passage's signature beat.
Flight / isolation	Strong	Four days alone in his bedroom, not eating, barely sleeping (his account to SI and TODAY).
Despair voiced plainly	Strong	“Not wanting to be alive anymore” — his exact on-record words. Use them verbatim; do not upgrade to “attempted.”

Physical-first restoration	Partial	Structure, sleep, meals, and therapy at The Meadows preceded any inner resolution — but there is no whisper-moment; the turn was gradual and clinical.
Recommission / “not alone”	Strong	Advocacy became the new commission; his message to other athletes is precisely “you are not the only one.”

Where the parallel breaks — say this out loud, or don't use the story

There is no theophany here. Phelps describes recovery through therapy and treatment, not an encounter with God, and he has not framed his story in Christian terms. The honest use is: the *shape* of restoration in 1 Kings 19 — rest, food, structure, then purpose — is the shape competent care still takes; the passage adds what the clinic cannot, the voice. Claim more and the congregation's fact-checkers (they have phones) will find the seam.

Sources

CNN, “Michael Phelps: ‘I am extremely thankful that I did not take my life,’” Jan 19, 2018 (Kennedy Forum remarks) • Sports Illustrated profile, Nov 10, 2015 (four-day isolation; The Meadows, 45 days; “really dark place” quote) • TODAY, “Michael Phelps opens up about struggle with depression” (2014 arrest and aftermath) • Washington Post, Jul 29, 2020 (*The Weight of Gold*). Excluded as under-sourced: the claim that a book he read in rehab “saved him from suicide” (single-outlet embellishment of his milder wording); precise check-in date at The Meadows.

Story Two — Buzz Aldrin: no duties to resume

Eight days after walking on the Moon in July 1969, Buzz Aldrin was the second-most famous man alive, feted in a world tour of parades and palaces. Then the tour ended. “I wanted to resume my duties, but there were no duties to resume,” he wrote later. “There was no goal, no sense of calling, no project worth pouring myself into.” What followed, by his own published account in two memoirs, was clinical depression and alcoholism — compounded by a family history he named openly: his mother, Marion Moon, had taken her own life the year before he flew. In a 2001 interview he called those years “a melancholy of things done.” The descent was long — a psychiatric hospitalization, a failed stint selling Cadillacs in Beverly Hills where he says he never sold a single car — and the recovery was longer: sobriety came in October 1978, nine years after the Moon. He then did something almost unheard of for a 1970s military man: he went public, chairing the National Association for Mental Health and spending the next half-century with a new mission, arguing America on to Mars.

Beat map

Passage beat	Carry	In the story
Collapse after triumph	Strong	The definitive modern case: the fall begins at the summit of human achievement itself.
Flight / isolation	Partial	Withdrawal into drinking and aimlessness rather than a literal flight; the isolation was real but slower.
Despair voiced plainly	Strong	“No goal, no sense of calling” — and he has spoken plainly about the depression and his mother's suicide for decades.
Physical-first restoration	Partial	Recovery ran through therapy, AA, and structure — years, not a night under a broom tree. No single restorative moment.
Recommission / “not alone”	Strong	Chaired the National Association for Mental Health — turning private collapse into public de-isolation — and adopted Mars as the new commission.

Where the parallel breaks — say this out loud, or don't use the story

Aldrin's restoration had no Horeb: it took nine years, relapses included, and he credits therapy and AA rather than faith. And one caution on the famous line: “the melancholy of all things done” is a journalist's paraphrase (Jeanne Marie Laskas), not Aldrin's sentence — his on-record wording is “a melancholy of things done.” Quote him, not the

retellings. The strength of this mirror is the first beat and the last: triumph is not immunity, and the way back ended, as Elijah's did, in a new assignment.

Sources

Buzz Aldrin, *Return to Earth* (1973) and *Magnificent Desolation* (2009) • NPR Fresh Air, Jul 20, 2009 ("things began to come apart"; his mother's suicide, on record) • Psychology Today, "Buzz Aldrin: Down to Earth," May 2001 ("a melancholy of things done"; NMHA chairmanship; 22+ years sober) • Biography.com, Jul 14, 2020 (October 1978 sobriety) • Snopes (mother's maiden name Moon, verified). Excluded as under-sourced: his grandfather's suicide (memoir-only); any involuntary-commitment framing.

A note for the pulpit

Both stories involve suicide or suicidal despair, as does the passage itself (v. 4). Best practice when preaching them: use the men's exact recorded words rather than dramatized versions, never describe method, and name help plainly — in the U.S., the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988). Statistically, someone in your pews needs the sentence.

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