

Bonfires

Series: When the Journey is too much
Elder Susanna Lynam | 2 April 2023

- Who would you turn to if you have mental health challenges?

Part One | Community

Read 1 Kings 19:19-21, *"When God asks Elijah, 'What are you doing here?' Part of his answer is: 'I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.' He's saying, I'm on my own, I'm all alone. A deep sense of loneliness and isolation often contributes to and accompanies mental health issues. God understands this, and in helping Elijah to move forward and stay healthy- he gives him a partner, Elisha. He leads him back to connection, he leads him back to community. Elijah told God not only once but twice that he was the only one left. Was this true? No. God gently reminds him that there are 7000 others who have not bowed down to Baal. When you are severely stressed, severely traumatised you can feel completely alone and isolated. Elijah completely believed that he was all alone in his journey. But his emotions and feelings were not feeding him the truth."*

- Why is it important to have communities when one is experiencing mental health challenges?
- How have you experienced the power of community during challenging times?

"Our mental health journey is not meant to be travelled alone. Connection and community is meant to be a part of our healing and ongoing health. But this doesn't just happen. It takes intentionality; a regular rhythm needs to be created in our lives. At least once a week deliberately connect with friends or family. Work it into your life- set aside time and journey with someone. And then there is connection to professionals. Counselling is often seen as a last resort but it doesn't have to be. It can become a part of our lives that helps us regularly debrief, giving us opportunities to process our emotions and the journey we are on."

- How are you investing in creating rhythm in connecting with communities?

Part Two | Setting Bonfires

Read 1 Kings 19:21, *"Elisha gathers up all his tools for farming, all the things he'd used to make his livelihood up until that point and burns them. He creates a great big bonfire. It's Elisha's way of demonstrating that he's 'all in'. He's showing that he is not leaving any avenue for him to return to his previous life. When you are struggling with a mental health issue, our minds have this way of dragging us back and causing us to relive the trauma or relive the painful emotions we are struggling with. When we are anxious or fearful we can feel stuck there. It's like 'ruts' in our mind. Elisha creates a bonfire because he doesn't want a way back to his old life. In the same*

way if we want to create healthy rhythms in our life we need to find a way to escape the well-worn ruts in our mind that keep returning us to the past. Maintaining our mental health and healing as we continue our journeys requires us cutting off the avenues that lead us back to relive our pain, despair, anxious thoughts and loneliness. To move forward well we need to create some bonfires.”

- Is there anything in your past impacting the mental health that you may need to set a bonfire on?

*“Today I’m going to use the idea of a bonfire as imagery to help us remember the rhythms we need to create to strengthen our mental health: 1) **The first thing you do is actively build the bonfire.** You collect the wood and stack it in a heap. God did not neglect Elijah’s physical well-being and neither should we neglect ours. 2) **Around the bonfire you gather with people you love and want to connect to.** The bonfire is a place of community. To stay healthy we need to create regular rhythms of connection. 3) Around the bonfire **you stop, you are still, you gaze at the fire and listen to the crackle of the flames-** you need stillness in your life. 4) Lastly you **use the time around the bonfire, to burn things that shouldn’t be carried any further.** You release your burdens, the baggage, the anxious thoughts and all the weight of the week into the flames of God’s love.”*

- How would you practise this bonfire creating in your own mental health journey?