

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Pursuing Wholeness*

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**SCRIPTURES:** *1 Kings 19:1-14*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

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Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church, to everyone here in the room and also to those of you tuning in to the livestream.

Sometimes there are debates about **the greatest athlete of all time** in their respective sports. Two, who have recently risen to the top of these conversations are the swimmer, **Michael Phelps (PIC)** and gymnast, **Simon Biles (PIC)**.

Simon Biles is arguably the greatest gymnast of all time. She has 25 World Championship medals, 19 of them gold. She also has two tricks named after her and at this point is the only gymnast to have ever landed these tricks in competition. In other words, she is doing things in gymnastics, no one has ever done before.

Michael Phelps is the most decorated Olympian in history with 28 medals including 23 gold medals. The Olympian in second place, behind Phelps, has only 18 medals, and only 9 golds. He blows other Olympic greats “out of the water”...no pun intended.

These two, share something in common that the rest of us, normal humans, cannot fully understand or appreciate. They excelled in their given sports at the highest level achieving a level of greatness most of us will never know.

Interestingly enough, these two athletic giants, also share something else in common. Something that I suspect every single one of us in here can appreciate and understand on some level. The human struggle for **mental health**.

Just two summers ago, during the Olympics, Simon Biles dropped out of the competition due to high levels of anxiety and stress that affected her physical body and kept her from being able to safely compete.

And Phelps, who has become an advocate for mental health, shares openly about his own struggles, even during the peak of his success and popularity.

He says, "**Really, after every Olympics I think I fell into a major state of depression. After 2012 that was probably the hardest fall for me. I didn't want to be in the sport anymore.**" He goes on to say that, a year later he found himself battling suicidal thoughts.

**"I didn't want to be alive anymore,"** he said. **"I'll never forget being in my bedroom at home, literally sitting in there for three to five days just not wanting to be alive."**

You see it turns out, that no matter who you are, no matter how successful, wealthy, popular, beautiful, athletic...mental health impacts everyone!

So today we are beginning a new sermon series called **Pursuing Wholeness (GRAPHIC)**...opening up the conversation about our faith and mental health.

Though I bring up Phelps and Biles, issues surrounding mental health are all around us and seemingly becoming more and more prevalent.

The statistics surrounding mental health in our world today are concerning. One research group suggests that **between April of 2020 and April of 2021** symptoms of

anxiety and depression leapt from **11% to 40%** of the population in the United States.

Among young people the statistics are even more alarming.

The Springtide Research Institute, surveys and interviews thousands of young people each year. They recently released sobering new findings on Gen Z's mental health after two years of pandemic life:

Over half of **young people (53%)** told Springtide in March 2022 that the biggest challenge they faced during the pandemic was their **mental health**. Nearly half of young people (48%) say they are moderately or extremely depressed. 1 in 4 say they are extremely stressed (25%) and 1 in 5 say they are extremely anxious (26%) or extremely lonely (21%).

Even more startling, is that among children ages 10-14 suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest cause of death.

But perhaps most concerning in the research is that many of these young people who are battling mental health issues, believe that the adults in their lives don't know the extent of their stress, anxiety, loneliness and depression.

And of course, bringing it even closer to home, we know that recently, in our own schools, in our community over the last few years, we have witnessed the reality of these statistics.

So, while statistics can be confusing and sometimes hard to fully wrap our minds around. One thing seems clear...

There's a good chance, in fact, there's probably a 100% chance, that there are folks sitting in here, battling, struggling with the challenges associated with mental health.

Or that if you are not personally, there's a good chance you know someone who is. A family member, a friend, a co-worker.

The most important part of your life isn't often what's happening to you, it's what's happening in you. The emotions you feel. The thoughts you have. The self-talk happening in your mind.

So, if you have your Bible. Open up with me...turn to

## **I. 1 Kings 19**

While you are turning there...I do want to make one acknowledgement as we dive into this series: I am not an expert when it comes to mental health. There are very likely folks in here who know far more about this conversation than I do. Please be gracious with me.

But I don't think that should keep us from starting the conversation and hopefully learning and growing together on this important issue. A good starting place for the church when it comes to mental health issues is to at least start talking about it, rather than avoiding it.

Now, our key passage of Scripture for this series is found in 1 Kings 19. Some of our sermon series we jump around to different Scriptures and we'll certainly bring other Scriptures into this series, but for the most part in this series, we're just gonna settle in to this one primary passage Scripture.

Interestingly enough it's a story about a man, someone who I think many Christians would consider a hero of the faith...but who has what we might call a mental and emotional meltdown.

His name is Elijah. And Elijah is a prophet of God. Which just happens to be one of the most high stress jobs in ancient Israel. In fact the better you are at this job, the more likely you are to be executed!

So, it's a high stress job. But Elijah is pretty good at it. He is like the cream of the crop, one of the greatest of all time.

In fact, you may be most familiar with a story about Elijah in **1 Kings 18**, perhaps the peak of his success as a prophet. Elijah has a competition with the prophets of a false god Baal on Mount Carmel. Remember this story? They are having a "competition" to see whose God is real. **Baal or Yahweh?** (Yahweh being the name that the Israelites would have used to refer to God.) And they set up an altar. And the God who is real is going to light the altar on fire. The prophets of Baal try everything to get Baal to show up. He doesn't. So then it's Elijah's turn. And just to rub it in, Elijah, has them pour buckets of water on the altar. Until the altar is sopping wet, drenched. Then he prays to Yahweh. And God shows up in such a significant way, the altar, the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, even the water are incertated by the flames.

Elijah wins the competition, and this is seemingly the height of his success. Unfortunately for Elijah the wicked King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel happen to be Baal followers and they are not happy about what Elijah has done and so they threaten to kill him. And this is where we pick up the story of Elijah's meltdown...

**1 Kings 19 - <sup>3</sup> Elijah was afraid<sup>[a]</sup> and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.**

**All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.”<sup>6</sup> 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.**

**<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> There he went into a cave and spent the night.**

**And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”**

**<sup>10</sup> He replied, “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.”**

**<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.<sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.**

For the next 5 weeks. We're just gonna spend some time walking through this story. Elijah goes from the pinnacle of success to rock bottom. How did this happen? What did Elijah experience? And how it very much relates to our own lives and this important conversation about faith and mental health.

First, I think it's important to acknowledge...

### **A. Mental Health Challenges can happen to anyone...**

...even great prophets like Elijah.

And Elijah wasn't the only one in Scripture. **Jonah** was extremely dejected after God didn't destroy Nineveh. He went and sat outside the city and said, *"It would be better for me to die than to live."*

**Jeremiah** lamented about the day he had been born.

**Job's wife** advised him to curse God and die.

One author says it like this:

**One of the great mysteries of mental health is that it is no respecter of persons. People who appear to have everything...career success, personal attractiveness, and financial security are as likely candidates as anybody else.**

If you are human, you are prone to...susceptible to mental health challenges.

**James 5:17 – Elijah was a human being, even as we are.**

So often in Christian circles the idea of mental health carries a stigma or shame. Often times it seems the church's response to issues of mental health has been, *"if you just have enough faith"* or *"if you would just pray a little more,"* or *"there must be some sin in your life that you need to confess to God"*...then all of your stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, pain...will just disappear.

This kind of thinking is not helpful and in fact is often detrimental.

Anybody in here ever feel anxiety about life? Doctors appts and tests coming up? Discouraged about your life circumstances or perhaps personal achievements you've made or not made? Feeling or wishing like you should have accomplished or be accomplishing more with your life? Worried about family members or the decisions your kids seem to be making? Uncertainty about the future? Do you ever stressed about relationships? Overwhelmed by busy-ness or big decisions?

If you experience stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness. It's doesn't mean there's something broken about you. It just means you're human. It doesn't mean your situation is hopeless. It doesn't mean you can't change or find help or make progress or grow. Happens to prophets, happens to pastors, happens to people just like you...not because there's something wrong with you, but just because you're human!

The great thing about being part of a church, isn't that now you're part of a perfect group of humans with no issues. It's that you part of a messed group of humans, who are just like you.

While mental health challenges happen at different levels and for many different reasons, let's acknowledge that it is common for all of us as humans.

So for some of us the first step is to acknowledge the reality of our mental and emotional health challenges. To be willing to share your story with someone else. Find a trusted friend this week and open up about some of the stress and anxiety, the shame, the loneliness you experience. Not looking for answers or to solve problems, just to be courageous enough to start talking about it and start eliminating the stigma.

Second,

**B. Mental health challenges are more than just spiritual.**



In fact, this is why I've called our sermon series "**Pursuing Wholeness.**" Mental health is part of the whole package of being human. Being human involves finding health in our spirituality. But just being spiritually whole doesn't make us fully whole. We need spiritual wholeness. We need physical wholeness. But we also need mental and emotional wholeness. And each aspect of our humanity affects, each of the other aspects.

When Elijah hits rock bottom, God doesn't show up and just say... "Just have a little more faith...just pray a little more...just believe a little stronger."

Rather, it's fascinating, I'm going to show you how this happens, but God actually begins the healing process by addressing Elijah's physical and emotional needs.

First, notice the importance of...

### **1. Physical Touch**

The Angel doesn't just talk to Elijah, he touches him...Verse 5 - **All at once an angel touched him...**

Again verse 7 - **<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him**

Appropriate and healthy physical touch is an important factor in our mental health.

One Pastor, during a sermon cited a collegiate study that suggested people who receive 10 meaningful touches in a day are likely to live longer. He then noticed a husband down in the front of the church who started poking his wife...1, 2, 3...I don't think that's the idea behind a meaningful touch.

Recently, my wife Jenny has been taking classes on health and nutrition. And she's been reading for her classes about the importance of our diets. But along the way they are learning about not just dietary health, but how other aspects of our humanity impact our physical well-being. One of the things she read was that we need regular hugs from other people in our lives in order to feel safe and secure.

But not just casual, quick hugs. Or side arm hugs. But that you need a good 20 seconds of embrace.

So we've kind of made this a thing at our house now. Each day I give my kids 20 second hugs.

Of course, we're talking appropriate hugs with appropriate people in your lives. But this meaningful physical touch has an impact on our mental well-being. So this week, 20 second hugs with the closest people in your life.

Second,

## **2. What you eat matters.**

Notice the Angel also provides food for Elijah.

**All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup>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.**

Because what you eat impacts how you feel and how you think.

Any stress eaters/anxious eaters...eat your feelings? Does it taste good? Yes. Does it resolve our stress and make our problems disappear? No. Sugar and caffeine all of these kinds of things...make us feel good momentarily, but then we tend to crash.

Elijah, on the other hand, in this story is given freshly baked bread and water. A good healthy meal because what you eat, has an impact on your mental health.

And no, I'm not saying you can't enjoy your favorite foods...ice cream or double-quarter pounders... just that if you are pursuing wholeness...a good starting place may be to evaluate your consistent and daily eating habits.

Third,

### **3. Sleep matters.**

Your sleep and rest habits also matter. Did you notice this? Part of the healing process for Elijah involves going to sleep in the story...twice.

**<sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.**

**All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."...He ate and drank and then lay down again.**

Almost as if God is saying, we're not addressing the real issues...mentally and emotionally until you get some sleep.

It's fascinating I was reading an article about recent **sleep deprivation** studies that are being done. In this one study, they took 48 adults and restricted their sleep to 4, 6 or 8 hours of sleep for two weeks straight. And then they had one group that was deprived of sleep for two nights in a row.

And throughout the study they then evaluated these 48 test adults on a whole host of factors. Comparing the 4 hour sleepers with the 6 hours sleepers and so on... Tested their cognitive performance, their reaction time, their mood.

What they discovered is... actually before I share this with you. I just want you to take a guess, on average how many hours of sleep do you think you get per night? Go ahead and tell the person beside you. Your best guest, how much sleep you get each night. Ready for this...study found that...

**Subjects who got six hours of sleep a night for two weeks straight functioned as poorly as those who were forced to stay awake for two nights in a row.**

In other words, the folks sleeping 6 hours a night were performing at the same level cognitively, as the group that didn't sleep for two nights in a row!

The article goes on to say that recent studies by the CDC suggest 1 in 3 Americans get less than 7 hours of sleep per night. And that most of us overestimate the amount of sleep we are getting by almost a full hour of sleep. In other words, if you just told the person sitting beside you that you think you get 7 hours of sleep on average per night, it's likely you actually are only getting about 6 hours of sleep per night.

Of course we are all different when it comes to sleep and the amount of sleep we need to function well, but it's good be aware that there is a connection between good sleep habits and our mental health.

And then fourth...notice that God gives Elijah plenty of

#### **4. Time**

**<sup>8</sup> 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.**

God gives Elijah over 40 days, because healing, related to mental health, often takes time. Days, months, years...

Sometimes we want instant healing. We want everything just fixed and back to normal instantaneously. Pray about it today and be good to go tomorrow. But one of the things we learn about God is that He is often not in a hurry. True healing takes time.

You might need to be patient with yourself. You might need to be patient with someone in your life.

Fifth,

#### **5. Medicine may be a necessary part of the healing process.**

Of course this concept doesn't come directly out of Elijah's story. But I would suggest it follows the basic principle that our mental health is not simply a spiritual battle.

Just like physical illness sometimes requires a doctor or a prescription or therapy or medication so also it can be with your mental health. Because you see healing isn't just about your theology or your beliefs, its about your physical well-being. It's about the food you eat, your sleep habits...and at times that may include doctors, professionals and medicine.

If you've seen my daughter Adalyn recently you'll notice she's been walking around with a boot on her foot. It's because she has a small fracture in her ankle. The boot is to provide support and allow for healing. Once you see the X-ray and the broken bone, nobody says... *"Well you have a broken bone, but just get over it and you'll be fine. Just think better. Just pray about it tonight and you should be good to go in the morning."* And yet, for some reason that seems to be our response to mental health challenges.

And so, it's important to say this morning...doctors, professionals, and medicine may be part of the healing process.

Then finally,

### **6. You're not supposed to handle it alone.**

Perhaps you've heard people say, "God won't give you more than you can handle." It's one of the most misquoted, misunderstood passages in all of Scripture. You can go look this up, but that verse has nothing to do with the hardships and heartaches you face in life. That verse is actually in the context of facing temptation in your life. When we use that verse to tell people they should be able to handle their hardship in life, we're not only misunderstanding Scripture, we're misunderstanding the heart of the gospel. The heart of the gospel actually is **"You can't do this on your own. You need a savior. You need someone who can do what you can't do."**

The Apostle Paul actually says this in **2 Corinthians 1:8-9** says...

**<sup>8</sup> We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.**

You can't do this on your own and that's ok.

In fact, look at verse 7 in Elijah's own journey...

**<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD came back...and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."**

Sometimes the journey is too much for you. It's ok to acknowledge you need help.

When our oldest son **Landon (PIC)**, had just learned how to walk he was so proud of himself. He like to think he was so independent. He wanted to walk everywhere, especially around the house. But if we went on a longer walk, like around the block. He would start off ok, bound and determined. But his little legs couldn't walk that far and he would soon get tired. He would muster all of his strength to stick with it, but eventually he couldn't do it on his own. And he would turn and look up and as a little toddler, he couldn't speak in distinct clear sentences like "Please pick me up father." It always came out in sort of broken toddler language "He-do Daddy. He-do". He was saying, Hold me daddy. The journey is too much. I can't do it on my own.

Folks that's the true heart of the gospel. Jesus walks into the dark caves of our lives...to meet us and to pick us up. He entered into our world. And walked that long, agonizing road to the cross, where he took on grief, loss, loneliness, rejection and ultimately death itself. And often our job in life is to look up to him and just say... "He do daddy. Hold me. The journey is too much. I can't to this on my own."

The Good News is He can. And he will. He can handle your pain, your depression, your loneliness, your shame...the message to Elijah isn't, don't worry you got this..." it was don't worry, I got this. I'll meet you in the dark cave. In your despair, in your pain. And we'll walk out together, and may take us a while. But even when it feels to much for you. We'll walk out together.