

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Anxiety*

**SERIES:** *Pursuing Wholeness*

**SCRIPTURES:**

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*\*Credit to Bible Gateway; Jonathan Wolfgang; Craig Groeschel; John Ortberg*

Well, what a powerful testament to God's presence at work in our community faith.

Today we are into the third week of our series called **"Pursuing Wholeness"**. That what it means to be whole involves many facets of life. Spiritual wholeness is often what we think about when we're coming to church. And of course physical wholeness seems to be a constant struggle. Eating right, exercising and doctor visits. But often over-looked and neglected is the mental aspect of wholeness. And as we're discovering, we really can't separate these various facets. To pursue wholeness incorporates all of them.

This morning we want to talk about another key aspect related to our mental health struggles. Today we want to talk a little bit about

## **I. Anxiety.**

Does anybody ever get anxious?

**It's that intense, persistent worry and fear about life.**

When you're a kid, all kinds of things to worry about. You worry about school and grades and taking tests and fitting in with your peers. When you're a teen you start

worry about appearances, going to college and your career path, finding a someone to marry. I remember, I worried about if I'd ever meet a girl who'd want to marry me. Then one day, I did, and then maybe only for a few moments of bad judgement on her part, but that was enough I got my foot in the door.

Then worried if we'd ever have a child. Then we did. When that little child was born, I realized I had everything I wanted and now that I was a husband and a parent, I would never have to worry about anything ever again. Cause that's how it works, right? And that lasted about 10 seconds, until I realized having a baby felt like non-stop worry. I have this little child now, I need to keep alive and grow and mature and teach...and I have no idea what I'm doing. Then worry about jobs and finances and health...

Can anybody else relate to any of this?

In fact, I was reading about this at the National Institute of Health website...that studies being done by geneticists have identified what they call "the worry gene." **(IMAGE OF GENE)** I'm not making this up. People who have the short version of this particular gene, are especially prone to worry. Isn't that fascinating...you can be genetically prone to worry, it can actually be built into your DNA. Now that I'm telling you this, how many of you are worried you have the short version of that gene? See? Anxiety just gets in our hearts, doesn't it?

The reality is whether you are slightly more prone to anxiety because of genetics or life circumstances or whatever...anxiety is a universal human struggle.

So if you have your Bible turn with me to **1 Kings 19**

This is our key passage for the series. Taking 5 weeks to walk through the mental health struggle of one of God's very own prophets. Hero of the faith, Elijah. And

each week, we're just kind of reading his story and finding where it connects with our own.

So, let's just see if we can identify where anxiety shows up in Elijah's story.

**<sup>3</sup> Elijah was afraid<sup>[a]</sup> and ran for his life.**

Can we pause here for just a moment? Anybody else recognize, right off the bat...Elijah's anxiety? Doesn't take long does it? Elijah's experience, the entire story that we are unpacking in this series is set in the context of anxiety...fear...worry.

But that's not the only hint of anxiety that we get from Elijah's story. It's sprinkled throughout. Jump down to verses 9&10...

**1 Kings 19:10 – 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.”**

You can almost sense the worry in his voice...his helplessness. *“I'm the only one left. They are coming to get me. What am I going to do?”*

Anxiety is at the very heart of Elijah running away from his community, his people, his responsibilities, his calling...life in general. This is what anxiety does in our own lives. Want to run away from our community, people, responsibilities. Find a cave where we can hide.

An important decision you have to make. A relational breakdown. Uncertainty about what will happen. A big change you know is coming in life. Concern related to issues our world is facing. Maybe you just feel overwhelmed by the daily responsibilities in your life.

Author Laura Turner says that **worry is like living at the street corner of “uncertainty and powerlessness.”**

Uncertain with how life is going to work out and the feeling that there is nothing you can do about it. You're familiar with this street corner, aren't you? Some of you are building a residence there. You may not be running for your life, but just like Elijah it can feel like our own life stories are set in the context of anxiety.

So let's just unpack this a little bit more.

First, it's important to know that...

**A. To feel anxiety is not a lack of faith.**

You know sometimes churches can give the impression that anxiety/fear is sign of weakness or a lack of faith. Maybe you've heard that or believe that. And it makes you feel ashamed about your anxiety.

Sometimes people read Elijah's story and they see his actions here as a sign of weakness or lack of faith in his life...he's running for his life. But that's a misconception. In reality, fear is probably what saved Elijah's life. Remember the wicked King Ahab and Jezebel had just threatened to kill Elijah. So he was afraid and ran for his life.

I was reading about this, fear, which is very closely related to anxiety, is just an automatic physiological response in your body/mind...and in many cases is can be a good thing. It can save your life or the life of someone you love.

For example, when our youngest son Keagan was very young, he was a brave little guy. And I remember this one time we were at a swimming pool and Jenny left me with Keagan. He was not able to swim yet. So she said *“you got your eye on him right? I’m leaving his life in your hands.”* I said, *“Sure.”* She left. I looked away for just a moment and as I turned back around he’s headed right for the steps to walk down into the pool. That natural physiological response (fear or at times anxiety)...ignited in my body as I went running for him. He made it just far enough that his head just dunked under the water, as I scooped him up and out of the water. And in that moment, I was so thankful that God had given me that natural anxiety-inducing mechanism. I’m so thankful I didn’t have to stop and think about what to do. I’m so thankful I didn’t have to formulate a plan. I’m so thankful that Keagan was too young to tell his mother about this incident, and that she would never find out that this happened. I’m just kidding.

The point is to feel some level of anxiety or fear is not a lack of faith...it’s normal!

If you’re human, you’ll experience it.

There’s a psychologist Tracy Dennis-Tiwary who has written a book, that I highly recommend called **“Why Anxiety is good for you, even though it feels bad.”** Here’s one of the things she says...

**As a clinical psychologist and neuroscience researcher, I’ve devoted the last 20 years to understanding difficult emotions like anxiety. I believe, we mental health professionals, have made a terrible mistake. We’ve convinced people that anxiety is a dangerous affliction and that the solution is to eliminate it as we do other diseases. But feeling anxious isn’t the problem. The problem is we don’t understand how to respond constructively to anxiety.** (Tracy Dennis-Tiwary)

So anxiety is not a lack of faith...it’s normal.

Second, this is why...

### **B. God doesn't punish us for our anxiety.**

Some of you in here, need to hear me say this today. You're ashamed of your anxiety. You're afraid what other people think of you or what God must think of you if you acknowledge your anxiety. But anxiety is not a sin.

It's interesting in Elijah's story...compare verses 10 and 14 for just a moment.

Elijah is terrified worried and goes running for a cave to hide. And that's where God says, what are you doing here Elijah? And Elijah responds with that sense of anxiety.

**<sup>10</sup>“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.”**

So, God essentially says, *“Ok I can see your anxiety, I can see your fear...so I'm going to show up.”* God promises his very presence to Elijah. And surely that must mean all of Elijah's fear and worry and anxiety is going to just disappear. But that's not what happens. God shows up and asks Elijah a second time, “what are you doing here?”

Verse 14...what does Elijah say...

**“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.”**

It's almost humorous...Elijah responds the exact same way as he did before.

So, if you can follow the storyline here...Elijah is anxious about life. God shows up in his life...Elijah is still anxious about life...God's presence didn't just take all of Elijah's anxiety away.

Anxiety clings to us. We can have moments of growth and moving forward and stepping out, but then anxiety comes creeping back in to our lives, doesn't it? We fall back into old patterns of thinking.

But notice this, God doesn't punish or reprimand Elijah when he falls back into his anxiety. He doesn't say, "*Why are you still worried? Why don't you just have more faith?*" Sometimes we assume God comes to us that way because that's how other people in our lives might come to us. "*Just get over it. Stop worrying about that. It's no big deal.*"

I remember this one humorous sign. You know how some churches have those signs with clever little sayings on them...one church had a sign that said...

**“Don't let your worries kill you, let the church help.”**

But God doesn't punish or reprimand us or rebuke us for our anxiety because anxiety is not a sin. Some of you need to hear me say that today.

The real challenge is when the feelings of anxiety begin to overwhelm and consume you. They become debilitating. You feel that sense of helplessness. Your mind starts racing and keeps you up at night. And that's when anxiety moves beyond that which is helpful and normal.

So, when you start to experience that overwhelming sense of anxiety in your life.

### **C. What do you do?**

Well first,

**1. You can be brutally honest with God.**

One of the things I love about Elijah in this story is that he doesn't hold anything back...that's really the essence of verse 10...Elijah just getting honest with God.

**“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.”**

*“I'm at the end of my rope. I need help. I feel stuck. It's too much for me. I can't handle all of this.”*

You know, I think there are many of us who don't get completely honest with God, we bottle up our feelings inside of us, because we're not sure if we're allowed. We've grown up with the mentality that maybe you should be careful what you say to God so that you don't offend Him. And yes, decorum and a sense of properness has its place as we enter God's presence, but Scripture is just really clear about this...when you are feeling anxious just get honest with God about it.

**1 Peter 5 – Cast all your anxiety on him, for he cares for you.**

Get brutally honest with God this week about what you're experiencing. It's ok.

If you've been around young children, you know that they are often very good at being brutally honest.

A few years ago, Jenny, was watching one of those Hallmark Christmas movies...in July. I've told her before one day God will hold her accountable for spending so much time watching the hallmark Christmas movies. God does not approve of that channel. Especially in July. But it wasn't God who judged her for this, it turns it was our daughter Adalyn, who at the time was probably about 7 or 8 years old.



A commercial came on for a self-beautifying product called **“Meaningful Beauty” (PIC)**. Are you familiar with this product? It is described as formulated with a “youth activating serum”. In other words, it promises to make the old look young again. Our daughter Adalyn, was sitting in the room, I told you kids have no filter. They just say whatever it is that’s on their mind. Adalyn looked up at the commercial on television then she looked at Jenny. Then she looked back at the commercial, then she looked back at Jenny. And then she opened her mouth, “Hey mom, you could use some of that meaningful beauty couldn’t you?” I started to laugh, then I looked at Jenny. She was not laughing. I stopped laughing. I scolded that little girl, how dare you say that to your young, beautiful, gorgeous, flawless mother.

Sometimes I think we just need to learn, it’s ok to be brutally honest with God about what we are feeling, what we’re thinking, what we’re experiencing in life. You won’t hurt His feelings.

Second, we need to accept that...

## **2. God doesn’t remove uncertainty.**

You should know Jesus never says he’s going to eliminate anxiety from your life. In fact, Jesus seems to say just the opposite. In his famous sermon on the mount.

He says, **“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow...for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of it’s own.”**

Jesus does not say, *“Don’t worry about tomorrow because if you have enough faith, you’re anxiety and worry will go away.”*

Jesus says, “In life you can expect trouble, hardship, you can expect things to worry about.”

In fact, jump down to verse 15... **15 The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came,**

In other words, go back to the dangers and the difficulties...go back and face the uncertainty.

Why does God do this? Because God wants Elijah to trust him, even in the uncertainty of life. And building trust requires some degree of uncertainty.

Faith is not certainty about how your life is going to work. Faith is saying God I'm going to trust you, even though I'm not certain. God never promises how life is going to go. How life will turn out. He doesn't promise a life of safety and comfort and familiarity. The job may not work out. The cancer may come back. Your children may make poor decisions. The relationship may not heal.

The greatest invitation in life, is not to try and find a life free of anxiety and worry and fear. No such life exists. The invitation rather is to a life in God's presence. So that when anxiety and worry and fear come...we know, He is right beside us.

That's why this mornings service was so powerful. All of those folks standing up here, getting baptized. Saying, *“God I trust you. I trust you with my life. I don't know what it will bring. I don't know what you have in store for me in the days ahead. But whatever it brings, I'm walking through it with you.”*

One of my favorite writers is Dallas Willard he makes a great statement in his book the Divine Conspiracy...

**With this magnificent God positioned among us, Jesus brings the assurance that our universe is a perfectly safe place to be.**

Isn't that such a great promise to remember? God doesn't eliminate uncertainty, but with his presence beside us, you can live each day with the assurance that our universe is a perfectly safe place to be.

Third,

### **3. You are not powerless.**

Even though there is always uncertainty, you not powerless. God doesn't say, "*Sorry Elijah you are stuck in this cave and there is nothing you can do.*"

Look at verse 15...

***15 ..."Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. 16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat to succeed you as prophet.***

God **reminds Elijah of his purpose in life.**

Elijah go back to your responsibilities as a prophet of God. He's saying to Elijah, I created you for a reason. I called you to be one of my prophets. I have a job for you to do.

And folks the same is true every single one of us. God created you for a reason. He has a job for you to do.

As a parent, as a student, as an employee. As a spouse. As a coach. When life seems confusing and confounding and out of control one of the best things for you to do is to focus on your purpose and your current responsibility in life. And to go do it to the best of your ability.

And then finally, there's one more thing God says to Elijah in the face of anxiety. You have to go all the way back to up to verse 5 to see this...

**“All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up...”**

I just love this. You know how anxiety...fear can paralyze you. You don't want to get up. You feel stuck, you feel helpless. You don't want to get out of bed in the morning. You don't feel like taking on the responsibilities of life. You don't feel like going to work or being around other people. You don't feel like doing anything!

In fact for some people it becomes the victim mentality. There's just nothing I can do.

But the truth is...you're not powerless. You can get up. Sometimes the most courageous act in the face of your anxiety is to just get up. Get out of bed. And then once you get up...get moving.

Start by making your bed. Because you are not powerless.

Start by making a good breakfast. Because you are not powerless.

Go for a walk.

If it starts with getting appropriate amounts of sleep and rest in your life. You can do that.

If it's with making that phone call to your doctor or therapist, dial the number...you are not powerless.

If it means taking that medication.

In fact, our Christian faith is a courageous “get up” kind of story. Jesus came into our world and he was rejected and arrested and beaten and nailed to a cross. And then, it wasn't his choice, but he put in a cave, a dark cave (similar to Elijahs cave) and a big stone was rolled in front. And it looked for all the world, like he was defeated once and for all and this was the end. And it looked like Jesus was powerless and that death and fear and anxiety would win in this world. But then what happened. Jesus got up. Didn't he? That's what resurrection is all about. Jesus got up. He got up and moved that immovable stone out of the way and he walked out of the cave. And then Jesus told his followers, you can have my power

living inside you. That get up kind of power, that gets you out of bed and back into the world.

So this morning, may you be reminded as you look at Elijah and learn from his story. It's true, life will never be free from worry and anxiety. But God doesn't punish us or scold us. Rather he comes and meets us right in the midst of our anxiety. He meets us there and he helps to get back up and get moving. He gives us power so that we are not powerless. May you know and experience God's presence in the face of your own anxiety this week!