

A Calming Presence

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

okay? But depression runs in my family. I have family members that struggle with real depression, and so, listen, I just want you to know it's not as simple as pray it away. This can be a very deep and complicated thing in people's lives, okay? That's one side, but the other side of the coin is this, is that it's like there's a take a pill for everything and absorb myself in just secular counseling and therapy, and that's going to solve all my problems. The problem with that is that's very dangerous because it's neglecting the spiritual side, and so kind of what I'm starting out tonight is just to say I want to kind of cut both extremes off that says it's only spiritual, and if your faith was strong enough, it would go away, and we want to say that's unbiblical, and the other side is to say, well, we'll just take a pill for everything and just let therapy be your problem and ignore the spiritual side, and I just want to say no to both, that somewhere in the middle is this holistic approach that God has created us as physical beings and spiritual beings, and we need to address both of them if we're going to address this rightly, and so I'm just going to kind of say that up front to say I'm denying both extremes that you're going to experience when it comes to these topics, and we want to take a biblical holistic approach to the topics of anxiety and worry and depression. You with me? All right, I got one more disclaimer. I'm a doctor, but I ain't that kind of doctor, okay? So what I want you to know is this, is like because I've acknowledged those two things, what we're not going to do over the next several weeks is therapy, okay? This isn't counseling session. This is Bible preaching, okay? So I'm going to preach the Bible. I'm going to preach the gospel.

[4 : 44] I don't think any of you are surprised by that if you know me, and so I've already acknowledged that there can be cases when you need to go beyond just the spiritual side, and you need to find help in the physical side, but here in this series, we're focusing primarily on what does God's Word say about the topics of anxiety and worry and depression and things like that, all right? We need both, and I know this is a really simple illustration, and then we're going to move on. Listen, when I have a headache, I pray and ask God to take it away, and I take Advil, okay? And there's nothing unbiblical with Advil, and all God's people said, amen, right? If I get a chest pain, I'm going to pray that God will take that away, and I'm going to go talk to a doctor, and so when you struggle with these things, and some of you may struggle on very, very deep levels, you need the Word of God, and you may also need to seek help. Both of those are appropriate, and both of those are biblical because God has given us general revelation, and He has given us special revelation as well. All good? That was the sermon before the sermon, and I don't ever do that, but I just felt like before we dive into these kind of topics, I just need to say a few things up front so you know what I'm saying and what I'm not saying, how I'm approaching this, and how I'm not approaching it. So with that, let's get to work.

You ready? Philippians chapter 4 and verse 4 through 7 is what we're going to launch this series with, this is just an introduction tonight. We're not going to cover everything. There's no way. In fact, as the week went on, I began to realize I can't even preach this entire passage in one night, and so we're going to be looking a lot over the next several weeks. So if you're able to stand, please do so, and let's read the scripture here. Philippians chapter 4, 4 through 7, this is our primary focus over the next few weeks, though we'll look at other passages as well.

Paul says this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He says, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your

requests be made known to God. And the very peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

You see why I can't preach all that in one night? Pray with me. Pray for me, and let's ask God to talk to us tonight. Lord, here we are. We are ready for this. We are excited to learn what your word says, what you have to say about these topics. Lord, we know that we cannot cover everything, but because you have spoken about these things, we want to listen and we want to study your word. And I know that everybody here to some level deals with this at some point. So talk to us, speak to our hearts and to our minds. In Jesus' name we pray. And God's people said, amen, amen. You can be seated. Hannah Wolfe was convinced she was going to die.

[8 : 24] She literally could not breathe. And at the age of 24, she was rushed to a nearby urgent care. The doctors did several tests to see what was going on with her physically, but they couldn't find anything wrong at all. And so they admitted her to the emergency room. It was there that they concluded that Hannah was suffering from a panic attack. Now, this was not the first time that Hannah had ever experienced a panic attack. In fact, it may have been the most severe, but it wasn't the first time. Her struggle with anxiety and worry and stress actually went all the way back to seventh grade. And this is how she describes it. Quote, my heart starts beating really fast. My chest gets really heavy. My hands go numb. It feels like someone is choking me to the point I can't breathe. Close quote. And her feelings of anxiety become so intense, they're debilitating in her life. She says, you don't want to get up. You don't want to do anything. It's a scary feeling. And some of you can relate to that. What's frustrating for Hannah is there really isn't anything that sets this off.

She says that her job is not stressful. She makes enough money. She lives in a very nice community. She has a great relationship with her parents and friends. But for whatever reason, quote, anxiety has become my personal demon. It always seems to be lurking.

Here's what I know. Hannah Wolf is not alone. And there are some of you here tonight, if you would be honest, you struggle with this as well.

It may not rise to the level of full-blown panic attacks, but you know what it's like to be anxious and worried. And there are plenty of reasons to be so. Amen? The world is a dangerous place, if you haven't discovered that. And a lot of things can happen to you. You can lose your job.

You could be walking down the street and get attacked. You might have a family member or someone close to you that just decides to abandon the faith. Your parents could be in an automobile accident.

[10 : 58] You could suffer a debilitating injury. You could contract a fatal illness. Your house could burn down. You could lose your savings and a very bad investment. Your spouse could leave you.

Your children could be harmed at school. Or maybe less significant things like your car may not start and you don't have the money to fix it. You could fail the exam. You could totally bomb the presentation.

And the list goes on and on and on. Here's the point. Look at this on the screen. In a world of uncertainties, anxiety is the meteor shower of what-ifs. What if that happens? And what if this happens? And what if I go there? And what about that? And if the potential dangers of life aren't enough, think about all the things that you need to get done this week. There are bills to pay and mouths to feed and households to manage and quotas to meet and sales to close, meetings to attend, budgets to balance, vacations, weddings, social events to plan. And somewhere in all that, you got to make time for the Lord. And we, every single one of us knows we don't have enough hours in the day to get all that done. Have I helped your anxiety yet? Some of you are like, I wasn't anxious until I went to church. And you give me all that list. I'm stressed out now.

There's so many things that go on in life. And it's why, according to the Anxiety Disorder Association of America, 19 million adult Americans struggle with some type of anxiety disorder. Anxiety, listen, anxiety disorders in the U.S. are the number one mental health problem among women. And second, only to drug and alcohol abuse among men. Stress-related issues make up \$300 billion every year in medical bills. Spending on anti-anxiety medications like Xanax and Valium have gone up from \$900 million to \$2.1 billion just in the last few years. It is why, congratulations America, the United States is the most anxious nation in the world. And it doesn't surprise me.

[13 : 24] This is a real, real, real thing. And the reason why I share all this, Hannah's story and all those examples of what can happen in life and the daily grind that we go through and how this is such a common struggle in America, I share all those for a lot of reasons. But one of the reasons I

share it is because it makes what the Apostle Paul says in chapter 4, verse 6 sound crazy. Here's what he says.

Look at verse 6. Do not be, say it, anxious about anything. Let me read it again. Keep in mind, everything I just said in the first 20 minutes of this introduction, right? Do not be anxious about anything. And our natural and right response to that would be something like this.

Whammy! Oh, that is true. I didn't see that coming.

And astute observation has led to laughter. We are laughing. And it is continuing. It's slowing down a little. But there's still a good spirit.

Yeah, and we slowly got to run. It's going to be less. There's a little chuckle. And it's done. You really wreck moments when you do that, Ron. So, we all want to laugh at that, do we not? Like, funny Paul with his funny jokes, right?

[15:11] Good one-liner to the church at Philippi. Don't be anxious about anything. Come on, Paul. You can't be serious. I mean, be anxious for less. That sounds reasonable.

Don't be anxious on Fridays. We could probably accomplish that one. But listen, Paul says here, and this is the Word of God, I remind you, you are to be anxious for nothing, nada, zero, zilch. Anxious for nothing. Not anything in your life. Now, to understand this, and I think this is really important because some of you are getting anxious about not being anxious. Aren't you right? You feeling that? Like, I can't do this, and so I'm stressing out, right? Let me relieve a little bit here to help you understand what Paul is saying. Paul is not saying, and this is important, zone back in, never have a moment of anxiety. He's not saying that. Okay, you say, well, how do you know he's not saying that? Well, here's the Greek word. Marino is the word, the Greek word that Paul is using here for anxiety, and it's in the present active imperative. Let me say that again. It's in the present active imperative, and you say, well, what difference does that make? It means it's an ongoing present state.

So you could actually translate the verse this way and be very grammatically correct. Notice it here on the screen, right? Do not be continually anxious about anything. Does that help a little bit? In other words, what Paul is saying is, don't live in an ongoing state of anxiety. This will preach. Notice it on the screen. Listen, the presence of anxiety is unavoidable. The prison of anxiety is optional. Somebody just say, preach, preacher. Say it again. The presence of anxiety is unavoidable. You're going to be anxious at times, but you don't have to stay there. You don't have to live there. You don't have to be in that prison. And that's exactly what Paul is talking about here. And speaking of prisons, the apostle Paul knows a little bit about those. In fact, and many of you know this, Paul is actually writing this letter to the church at Philippi in which he says, do not be anxious for anything from a prison.

And I want you to picture this in your mind, that this phrase, be anxious for nothing or do not be anxious about anything is written by a 60 year old man gazing out the window of a Roman prison.

[17:57] He's 30 years a Christian. He's received 39 lashes on five different occasions. He's been beaten with rods. He's got scars like a spider web on his back. He's been left for dead, deserted by friends, faced shipwrecks and storms, been carrying the weight of newborn churches, division that's happening among Christians, false teachers that are trying to get into the churches, all while awaiting trial by a Roman emperor who's known for making examples out of Christians by putting them to death.

Paul's got all that going on in his life. How's your life feeling right about now? Paul's got all that going on, all that going down in his life. And you would think his words, be anxious for nothing, is like he just arrived at some Jamaican beach hotel, right? Hey, no worries, man, right? Just, just no worries, stress-free life. Don't be anxious for anything. And Paul's like, oh, listen, oh, listen, there's nobody in this room that's ever had to fight anxiety like I have fought anxiety. But I've learned that I might be in a Roman prison, but it doesn't mean I have to be in a prison of anxiety. I've learned this lesson in life in Church of Philippi, Faith Family Church, years and years and years from now. I want to show you how. I want to teach you how. I want to know how, I want you to know how you can live a life that doesn't have to be a prisoner to ongoing anxiety.

So, what does Paul teach us here in terms of how we can live a life that is anxious for nothing? And there's three things in this text, but can I encourage you tonight? We're only going to deal with one. Okay, some of you are like, he ain't got time for three. Hush, right? There's three things in the next couple of weeks. We're going to unpack them all, but I'm just going to look at the first one right. But I'm going to give you all three right now. Here's the three. In terms of Philippians 4, 4 through 7, this

is what Paul is going to say is this ingredient to learning how to not be anxious for anything, to not live in a prison of anxiety. First of all, there's a calming presence that we need to understand. There's something about God we all need to know. Second is there's a continuous practice. There are things you actually need to do when you're anxious so that you don't remain in that ongoing state. Are you all with me? Say yes. There are things you need to know about God. There's things you need to personally do. And then thirdly, there's a controlling peace that's going to take over.

[20 : 42] The peace of God that's going to guard your heart and guard your mind in Christ Jesus. So a calming presence, a continuous practice, and then a controlling peace. We'll look at those one by one.

Tonight, our focus is just the first one, and that is this calming presence, this calming presence. Let me show you where I take this from the text. Look back at chapter 4, verses 5 and 6.

It says this. Everybody say this with me. The Lord is at hand. That's what Paul says first. The Lord is at hand, so do not be anxious about anything. In other words, one of the reasons why we don't have to live in a prison of anxiety, we don't have to live in this ongoing state of worry and stress and depression is the Lord's at hand. The Lord is at hand. There is a presence, a calming presence that can enter into your life and be with you in this anxiety that will comfort you. In other words, here's another way of saying it. Notice it on the screen. You're not alone in your anxiety. That's why we sing there's another in the fire. There's someone with you. There is someone that is never going to leave you when you are in your darkest night. Someone's with you. You may not feel it, but the truth is the Lord is at hand.

And to unpack that phrase, we're actually going to go back to probably one of my favorite stories, and there's a reason because I just relate to it so much. And I preach an entire sermon on this. If you want more content on it, it was back in our Ashes series, which was quite some time ago. And it's the story of Elijah. And I'm actually going to use the story of Elijah tonight to unpack the phrase that the Lord is at hand. And that's what we need to remember and know in our anxiety. So first, let me break down the context of Elijah's situation. And many of you know this story, but listen, it's important to go back to the things that we know because oftentimes God gives us new insight or things that we thought we knew that we just needed to hear again. Amen.

So here's what Elijah's doing. Elijah's a prophet. I don't know if you know this, but in the Old Testament, being a prophet was the worst job you could have. And the reason why it was the worst job you could have is because it meant that God was raising you up to going to a people who were totally rebellious to give them bad news. It usually meant something like, y'all are way out of hand and way off tracks and God's going to judge you.

[23 : 23] So imagine having that kind of responsibility, that kind of calling to go and deliver bad news. Well, in Elijah's case, there's a king of Israel. His name is Ahab. And he is married to an Assyrian woman by the name of Jezebel. That's what she looked like. Jezebel. She was a witch if there was ever a witch. All right. And she was Assyrian. And so Ahab married her so that he could have the protection of Assyria. And she enters in Israel and brings with her all the idol worship of Baal. And she begins to throw out all the worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel, and begins to incorporate Baal worship.

And the nation of Israel turns their back on God and starts worshiping Baal. So God raises up a prophet by the name of Elijah. And Elijah, according to 2 Kings, looks a lot like John the Baptist. Okay, the Bible actually says, this is all it says about Elijah, is he was covered in hair and wore a belt.

In other words, Elijah looked something like this. There's a picture of Elijah. He's like Chewbacca from Star Wars. He's covered in hair and wears a belt. That's it. And Elijah comes to Ahab with this message. This is the message he's going to deliver. 1 Kings 17, verse 1. As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word. In other words, y'all have, because I think he would have said y'all, y'all have turned your back against God.

And God is going to judge you. And what that means is there's not going to be any dew. There's not going to be any rain until I say so. And then he disappears. He's just gone. Poof. Vanishes.

And he's going to spend the next three years of his life out in the wilderness being fed by ravens. Like literally the Bible says that ravens brought him food morning and night and fed him. Like how cool.

[25 : 28] Like you thought Amazon delivery was pretty awesome. Like that's pretty awesome. Like ravens are just bringing him food every day and God provides for him. And during all of that time, guess what doesn't happen? Rain. There's no dew. There's no rain. Everything starts drying up and Ahab is about to lose his mind.

Where is Elijah? Where is this prophet that said this? Send out the rescue squad. Go and find this man. And after three years, Elijah shows up and he says, I'm going to challenge you to a duel. I'm going to challenge you to a showdown. You remember this story. He takes all the prophets of Baal and he says, we're going to have a sacrifice and we're going to call down God to bring fire upon that offering.

And whoever's God does it is the true God. 850 prophets of Baal begin to cry out and call down fire and it's crickets. Nothing. In fact, if you remember the story, Elijah starts smack talking.

Like he literally is like, is your God in the bathroom or something? Like, you know, is something going on here? So like Christian smack talk. Then all of a sudden, Elijah calls down fire from heaven and God sends fire down. It is incredible. And the people of Israel, like, you're not going to believe this. Yahweh showed up. We were in the wrong. We should have never worshiped Baal. We're turning back to the true God. You talk about revival, man. And not only that, all 850 prophets of Baal are killed. I mean, this is like the high of all highs. You talk about success in ministry. I'd be walking around like, you know, I'm the dude that called fire down, right? You remember when it was one versus 850 and the 850 died? That was me. It'd be the first thing on my resume, right? And so you would think Elijah is really, really thriving here because the people are repenting. They're turning to the Lord. Baal is being exposed for the false God that he is.

And here's what goes down. You remember? Jezebel, the wicked witch of the West, is angry as she can be. And she issues this threat, 1 Kings 19 too. Jezebel sends a messenger to Elijah saying, so may the gods do to me and more also if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow. In other words, Jezebel issues a threat that she's going to kill Elijah. And you remember how Elijah responds, ha, silly woman. Did you just see what happened? Did you see all this?

[28 : 16] Do you know who I am? Like I'm standing my ground. I'm standing firm in God. I'm confident in what he's going to do in and through me. I ain't going nowhere. It's not exactly how the story goes.

The story actually goes like this. 1 Kings 19 verse 3. Then Elijah was afraid. Look at all this yellow. Look at all of this in this passage.

And he arose and he ran for his life. And he came to Beersheba, which belonged to Judah, and he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. And he came and sat down under a broom tree and he asked that he might die. Saying, I've had enough.

It is enough. Now, O Lord, take away my life. For I am no better than my fathers.

Elijah's in a crisis. Listen, please lean in. Please lean in. I know we've laughed and had a little bit of a good time tonight. But I want you to lean in for just a moment and hear this. Elijah is seriously in a dark, dark place. He is worried. He's stressed. He's anxious. He's afraid. And what is he afraid for?

[29 : 47] He's afraid for his life. Listen to me. Like Hannah Wolfe, he can't breathe. He can't breathe. He feels like his life is over. And why is that? I need you to listen. Are you with me? Listen. Anxiety and fear caused Elijah to believe a false narrative. And here's the false narrative. Notice it on the screen. It's that the power of Jezebel is greater than the power of God.

Anxiety and worry and fear caused Elijah to believe a false narrative. And it will do that for you.

You'll begin to believe in the power of your circumstance, the power of your boss. Or what if they do that to me? And what if that happens? And what if this? And I'm not going to be able to get it all done. I just don't have the power. And you have forgotten the power of God.

And that's what anxiety and fear does. It begins to make us believe a false narrative. Even though Elijah had been fed by the ravens. Even though he had seen fire come down to the altar. Even though he had watched 850 prophets of Baal be killed. He still feared Jezebel more than he trusted God. He was afraid. And he wanted to die. And the reason why I say that this, two things, why I'm using this story tonight, why it's one of my favorites, and why I'm going to be honest with you as we go through this series, is I just resonate with Elijah. And if you don't like your pastor being this real, then I don't mean this bad. I don't know that this is the place for you because we're going to be real. Elijah is a man in ministry that at times was in very deep and dark places to the point he just wanted to quit. And I'm just going to be honest with you, I've been there too. Do not think that people called of God to be the prophet of God don't struggle with dark places.

And I resonate with this story. I hope you do too. And I hope that you're glad to be a part of the church that's willing to enter into that reality and not be fake. Listen, I'm serious about that. You come up to me at the end of this service and you say, pastor, I struggle with darkness. Do you know what you have? You have a friend, not a judge. Because the Bible, according to God's grace, gives us stories like this where we see a man of God, used by God, called of God, struggling with fear and anxiety and stress and depression. He wants to die.

[32 : 31] How did he get there? And how do we get there? Here's a few quick things. We talked about this even last time is we run too thin. We run too thin. Elijah ran a hundred miles to get away from Jezebel on foot. A hundred miles doesn't seem like that much to you because you own a car.

Elijah ran a hundred miles on foot. In other words, he ran himself to a final place of safety and he was unhealthy when he got there. And many of you can do, many of us, I should say, do the same thing. Our calendar is too full. Our commitments are too many. We run ourselves too thin. And then we wonder why anxiety is creating a false narrative in our minds that God is somehow not powerful enough to get us through. Number two, this is the biggest one. I'm talking to Wes here so y'all can just listen in. We're too prideful to ask for help. Do you remember what Elijah did? He left his servant behind. I got this. I don't need you. I'll do this on my own. I don't need your help.

I'm strong enough. I've been in ministry long enough. I can handle this. You stay here and I'll go deal with what I need to deal with. There's a biblical word for that. It's called pride.

And some of you, some of us, the reason why we're caught in an ongoing state of anxiety is because we are so prideful, we will not ask, help. I can't fight this battle alone. I can't deal with this alone. I can't do it. I need somebody to help me. And as long as pride reigns, the cycle continues. Elijah thought he could handle this on his own, thought he could deal with all of this by himself. A third thing, oh my goodness, we focus on the negative. We focus on the negative, right? Where do you say, where are you getting this from? Do you remember the statement that Elijah made?

[34 : 27] I am no better than my fathers. What? You remember the ravens? Do you remember the fire?

Do you remember the 850 prophets that were killed of Baal? And you remain? What do you mean you're no better than your fathers? Don't you see what God has done through you? Can I be really honest with you?

And I might, I literally might start crying. Many of you know that my grandfather was a pastor for 51 years. And there are times that I can get low enough in ministry that I walk out the door on a Saturday night or a Sunday morning and I say, my grandfather would be ashamed of me.

Even though there's no basis for it. My grandfather wouldn't have liked that sermon. I wouldn't have made him proud. I'm no better than my fathers. That's anxiety talking.

That's stress and worry talking. It's a false negative or it's a false, it's a false narrative because you're letting the negativity in your brain win. You got voices that talk to you?

[35 : 46] I got voices that talk to me. It happens to me while I'm preaching. Okay, somebody gets up, walks out to get a drink of water and I think, what did I say to offend them? They're just going to get water, right? You lean over and show something on your phone and I'm like, see, this sermon's so boring and you're just showing them verse seven. But I got this person that talks to me like you got somebody that talks to you and it can often be negative and I let that narrative win.

Which is why I ain't getting to this part of the sermon yet. Watch what's going to happen in a few weeks in Philippians 4 where Paul's going to say, think on these things. What is honorable and right and true and pure? Paul's going to help us win the battle of the mind so that negativity doesn't win like it did in Elijah's life. I'm no better than my father's. Fourthly, we forget God is with us. We forget God is with us.

Anybody know what Elijah means? What the name Elijah means? Here it is. Here's the breakdown. El means God like Elohim. I means my. Ja for Yahweh, right? Means breath. In other words, here's what Elijah means. God is my breath. Listen, listen. The man who can't breathe because of anxiety forgot his name. Did you hear me? The man who can't breathe because of his anxiety forgot his own name.

God is my breath. God is my breath. You see, anxiety wants to take your breath away by forcing you to breathe the wrong air. Are you with me? Anxiety wants to take over because it wants to get you to breathe the wrong air rather than letting God be your breath. Tonight, what we need to do is remember that God is with us. He is at hand. So what does Elijah do? He takes a nap. And that's telling as well, isn't it?

As if everything else he said is not telling about his place of depression and anxiety, he takes a nap. And you've done this. I've done this. Why do we go to sleep? Why do we take a nap when we're down?

[38 : 31] It's because we think, you know, if I go to sleep, it won't be on my mind. If I go to sleep, I won't have to deal with it. If I can just shut my body down, then maybe I can find a little bit of rest.

So under a broom tree, Elijah takes a nap, but God isn't going to let him take a nap for very long. He's going to send an angel of the Lord who's going to come and wake Elijah up. And here's what happens. Pick it up in first Kings 19 11. And he said, go out and stand on the Mount before the Lord.

And behold, the Lord passed by and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke into pieces the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind and after the wind and earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake and after the earthquake fire, but the Lord was not in the fire and after the fire, the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, what are you doing here, Elijah?

Elijah, what are you doing? What are you doing in this place? What is this? This is the calming presence of God. What are you doing? Why are you running? Why are you afraid? Why have you let fear and anxiety control your life? Let me still Paul's phrase in Philippians 4. Why are you living in an ongoing state of anxiety? It was perfectly fine to feel anxious when you got the threat.

The problem is you let that threat lead you into an ongoing state of anxiety. Why? Why are you here? And then you notice that God does all these mighty things, earthquake, fire, wind. And why is he doing all this? He's trying to show Elijah that he is able to do all these things, but none of those things, listen to me, listen to me, none of these things are what Elijah needs. He doesn't need to be reminded ultimately that God can send an earthquake and God can bring down fire and God can send a mighty wind. Oh, God shows off his power, but then he shows Elijah what he needs. Stop there for just a moment. Isn't that often what we want God to do in our times of anxiety?

[41 : 02] God, just change my situation and just take them out and just move my company and give me the money that I need. God, do some type of big, miraculous, powerful thing. Listen, God can.

Oh, God can. He can do exceedingly more than you think he can. But that ain't what you need. And it's not what Elijah needed. What did Elijah need? He needed the whisper of God. And why did he need the whisper of God more than seeing the mighty, powerful things of God? And here it is. Are you ready? The whisper was the reminder that God was always that close.

Do you know how close I've been to you this entire journey? Close enough to whisper.

I've always been at hand. I've always been with you every moment of this anxious journey. In other words, again, to take Paul's phrase in Philippians, for the Lord is always at hand. So do not be anxious for anything. The Lord doesn't rebuke Elijah for his anxiety. Somebody say amen. He's not rebuking you.

The Lord is not looking at you tonight saying, you're such a weak Christian. If you just had more faith, God, I'm so ashamed of you. No, God doesn't rebuke Elijah. You ready? He breathes on him.

[42 : 59] He reminds him of his name in a whisper. I'm your breath. I'm with you, son. I've always been at hand.

Listen, anxiety makes you feel like you lose your breath. God's presence reminds us that he is our breath. Anxiety makes us feel alone. God's presence reminds us he's always his closest.

He's a whisper. Just breathe. The breath of God tonight. Knowing that no matter what you're going through, no matter how dark the night is getting, the Lord is at hand. And you don't have to live in an ongoing state of anxiety. Can I give you one more quick thing before I'm done? I'm going to anyways. All right, so I'll just ask your permission of what I'm already going to go ahead and do. What was Elijah afraid of? What was Elijah anxious about? What was he scared of? He was scared that he was going to die, right? He was afraid that Jezebel was going to kill him.

Does anybody remember how Elijah's life ends? Elijah is only one of two people that just get taken out.

[44 : 25] Elijah leaves. Elijah leaves. How cool is this? Leaves planet earth on a chariot of fire. In other words, Elijah doesn't face death. Notice it on the screen. Elijah never faced the thing he feared the most. You might say this, that Elijah was anxious for nothing.

Most of us are anxious about things that are actually never going to come to pass the way they think they're going to. And listen, even if they do, the Lord is at hand. He is as close as a whisper. And he will not forsake you. Faith family, maybe you're here tonight and you're like Hannah. And you struggle with panic attacks. Maybe you're like Elijah and there's something going on in your life that's making you live in fear. Listen to a man who had peace in a prison. He had peace in a prison. A man who knew the weight of life in ministry. A man who learned to be anxious for nothing. And he learned it because he knew that no matter what he went through in life, the Lord was always at hand. He's always as close as a whisper. It's the calming presence of God. And not only does the gospel promise us that the Lord is never going to leave us alone in our anxiety. I've got even better news.

The gospel reminds us that we have a savior who can sympathize with us in our times of weakness. [46 : 19] You see, listen, your savior knows what it's like to be troubled and afraid. Your savior knows what it's like to feel alone and abandoned.

But your savior also knows that no matter what your father is going to see you through. He's never going to leave you.

And that, fate family, is the only reason why you and I can be anxious for nothing.

And God's people said, amen. Pray with me. Pray with me. Thank you, Lord, for how real your word is.

Thank you, Lord. How it speaks into the real and dark places of life. Thank you that tonight, if we struggle with depression, if we struggle with dark things, if we feel times of anxiety, we're not judged.

[47 : 39] We're invited into a loving father who just wants to breathe into our life and be our breath.

And so this opens the opportunity for us to be real about our struggles. I mean, if Elijah, a man of God, a prophet of God, used to do mighty things of God, can find himself in the very next moment under a broom tree wanting to die, I think we can be honest about our struggles as well.

And I know that not everybody in this place struggles to the same level of worry and anxiety, but to whatever level it is, God, help us and teach us to not be anxious for anything, to not let anxiety win, to keep us in a prison and to keep us down.

And so, Lord, this is just the beginning of this journey over the next few weeks, but we pray that you would continue to bring freedom and this peace that's talked about in Philippians 4, the peace that you have that will guard our hearts and minds.

May we begin to experience that even tonight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.