



# Anxiety, Stress and the Christian Life

Welcome to the ANCHORED Sermon Series on mental health and the church. It will not be comprehensive but will certainly help us think Christianly about how Biblical principles, combined with scientific and medical information, can better equip Christ Church to care for those living with mental illness and/or their caregivers. The discussion sheet for Week 1 is longer than usual to provide some context, definitions, and statistics that will help inform our journey during and after ANCHORED.

## Background

In 2019, Christ Church applied for and was awarded the John Stott Award for Pastoral Engagement, a grant from Trinity International University; we were one of six churches selected across the country. The Stott Award supports study of the intersection between faith and science from a theological perspective. Christ Church chose the topic of mental health and faith in light of the increase in mental health issues today, and the belief that the Christian faith and church can be an important resource and outreach for those struggling with mental illness.

## Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines **mental health** as "A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."<sup>1</sup>

In general terms, **factors such as biology, environment, and culture** contribute to mental health. In some instances, an imbalance of these factors can contribute to **situational or chronic mental illness**. Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking, or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work, or family activities.<sup>2</sup>

Diagnosis of mental illness by a licensed healthcare provider is generally based on: 1) Symptoms (thoughts, moods, behaviors), 2) Duration of presentation, and 3) Degree of distress and impairment.

## Terms and Definitions

Each week, we'll share some terms and general statistics related to mental health and mental illness

**-Psychologists** provide psychotherapy (i.e., counseling, talk therapy, etc.) to help people living with mental illness. They are not medical doctors and cannot prescribe medicine.

**-Psychiatrists** are medical doctors, can diagnose mental illness, can manage treatment, and can provide a range of therapies, including but not limited to pharmaceutical medicines.

**-Biology** typically refers to genetics, biological pathways in the body such as neurotransmitters, neuroplasticity, inflammation, and may also include brain injury.

**-Environment** may refer to a variety of things from before/during/after birth, trauma, stress, family, relationships, experiences, nutrition, sleep, physical activity, posture, and electronics.

**-Culture** is essentially what we hear/see/feel that culture is saying that matters: happiness, self-actualization, meaning, higher purpose, morals, ethics, parenting styles, social media, (un)safe spaces, 24/7 365 hurried and busy lifestyles, narrative on stress ("good" and "bad"), etc.

## A Few Statistics

*Mental illness knows no boundaries with respect to age, gender, or race.*

Nearly 1 in 5 US adults live with a mental illness (46.6 million in 2017 or 18.9% of all adults)

Young adults aged 18-25 had the highest prevalence of any mental illness (25.8%)

Lifetime prevalence of any mental disorder for adolescents aged 13-18 is estimated at 49.5%

Women (22.3%) vs. Men (15.1%) for any mental illness

Multiracial (26.8%), White (20.4%), Hispanic (16.9%), African American (16.2%), Asian (14.7%)

*Anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders in the US and worldwide*

*Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide*

*Suicide is the second leading cause of death among people aged 10-34 in the US, the tenth leading cause overall*

The overall suicide rate has increased 31% since 2001

*Treatment (most available data)*

43.3% of US adults with mental illness received treatment in 2018

50.6% of US youth aged 6-17 received treatment in 2016

11 years: the average delay between onset of mental illness symptoms and treatment

60% of US counties do NOT have a single practicing psychiatrist

## **SERMON: Elijah - I Kings**

1. In light of the introductory information provided above, what information was surprising to you? Resonated with you?

2. In his opening comments, Pastor Mike cites 2 Corinthians 1:8, where Paul writes,

*"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, 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."*

He also notes that some of us may have had a week (or weeks!) where we or those we love may have felt like the second half of the verse.

How have you seen or been involved with a Christian response to supporting those living with mental illness and/or their caregivers?

3. In I Kings 17, we pick up where God sends Elijah to inform Ahab and Jezebel (King and Queen of Israel) that He (God) is going to withhold rain and dew from the land due to their evil and idolatrous ways. Elijah disappears for a few years and returns in I Kings 18 when the drought has brought Israel to her knees. The people of Israel with the influence of Ahab and Jezebel have worshipped Baal. Elijah challenges the 850 prophets of Baal to a test: whichever God sends down fire to consume the offering will be recognized as the true God. Despite their efforts, with taunting from Elijah, there is no fire at the altar of Baal. Elijah then places 12 stones around his altar (representing the 12 tribes of Jacob), has them pour water on and around the offering, and with one prayer—fire descends from God, consumes the altar, the water surrounding it, and even the stones and sand as well!

Elijah then goes to Mt. Carmel and prays to God for rain. The seventh time he asks his servant to look toward the sea, a small cloud "as small as a man's hand" is seen. The wind rises, and a heavy rain falls.

This is an amazing story of God's control of nature and perhaps a foreshadowing of Jesus calming the wind and waves; both are examples of God demonstrating power and authority over the natural world.

What might Elijah have felt when he saw the rain and dew stop, when he saw the impact of the drought on the people of Israel, and when he saw the rain come again?

Why do you think the fire descended and consumed the altar on the "first prayer" but it took seven for the rain to restart?

Have you ever felt like God has not answered your prayers for help (for you or someone you love)?

In I Kings 19, when Jezebel hears about Elijah's (God's really...) success in the competition with the prophets of Baal and the rain returning, she sends a message to Elijah that she will have him killed within a day. Elijah - just recently strong in faith, hearing and acting on God's voice - flees for his life. In I Kings 19:4 we see Elijah asking (God) to die.

What has happened to Elijah from the acts of faith in chapter 17-18 to chapter 19 verse 4?

In I Kings 19:10-15, we see God pursuing Elijah. We also see more natural events including wind, fire, and earthquakes, but "...the Lord was not in ..." any of those. He was in the gentle whisper (verse 12).

How can we hear God in the midst of the fears, pressures, and stresses of life?

How can we help each other know God's presence in similar situations?

## **RESPONSE:**

Set aside a few minutes each day to read a passage of scripture, pray, and listen for the gentle whisper.

Write down three "positive" things each day on a notecard, maybe something you are thankful for or something that went well that day.

What will you do to reach out to someone you care for who is in a difficult place?

Pray for wisdom and insight for those providing care and support to people living with mental illness during the coronavirus pandemic.

Begin to think about how you could be involved during and after the restrictions are being removed.

## **RESOURCES:**

Review additional resources [here](#), or reach out to the pastoral staff or a counselor or healthcare professional.

## **REFERENCES:**

1. World Health Organization. Promoting mental health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice (Summary Report) Geneva: World Health Organization; 2004. [Google Scholar]

2. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness>