

Today is going to be a different day. We're not going to cover our James passage today. You can catch up by watching Mark's sermon from our Foster City campus. We have some sad news to share about a tragic loss. Earlier this week, Alex Horvath, husband of our CPCKids Director at South Campus, Megan Horvath, passed away earlier this week. Alex suffered from mental health issues, and tragically took his own life.

It's been a difficult week, and I'm sure the news stirs something in you. I want to take a few minutes and pray for Megan and her family during this time of grieving and loss. (Megan is back with her family at this time.) And then I have a few things that I want to share this morning as we process this news.

### **Two Burdens**

As I think about this news, two things have been on my mind. First, I'm heart-broken. I'm heart-broken for Megan as she grieves the loss of her husband. I'm heart-broken for Alex in his suffering. I'm heart-broken with unanswered questions, what-ifs, the confusion, and the complexity of each of our stories.

Second, I'm drawn out of this specific situation with Alex to consider my story and your story. One of the things Megan asked this week is that we share the details that Alex suffered from mental health struggles, and that he took his own life. Though it's tragic and awful, she wanted us to talk about these things.

One of the positive things about our culture's progression over the past decade has been a greater openness to talk about mental health. Mental health struggles are a reality for many people. One study showed that one in five adults struggle with mental health. It's a reality. Rather than stepping away from it, I think we, as the church, can lead the way in being a safe space and provide hope to move forward.

I was talking earlier this week with Steve Kinstler, who is on our staff and a licensed Marriage Family Therapist. He described mental health as including three components: psychological (a medical condition that disrupts our thinking and ability to relate to ourselves or others) physiological (chemical dynamics that deeply impact our way of operating), and spiritual (sense of the loss of God). I see my role, not in the first two arenas - that is for others who are trained - but I can speak to the spiritual component.

Maybe this news prompts grief and pain in you. Maybe there is someone in your life who struggles with mental health issues,

and this news brings them to mind. Maybe you have struggled with mental health. Wherever you are, I want to take you to a story in Scripture that can offer hope in the midst of darkness.

### **The Fight is to See**

Here is what I want for you about today: I want you to fight to see when darkness surrounds you. Maybe the darkness is a struggle with mental health. Maybe the darkness is simply a low season. Whatever your circumstances, I want you to fight to see when darkness crowds out the light. At the end of our time, I'm going to ask you to do something challenging - to seek out people who can help you see when you can't see. If you live in this way, I believe you will see, fresh again, that God is greater than whatever is against you.

I want to take us to a story in the Old Testament book of 2 Kings, which can help guide us. In 2 Kings 6, the Syrian king was planning attacks against Israel. But each time he attacked, Israel was waiting and defeated the enemy. Israel knew where to defend itself because the Lord told the great prophet, Elisha, who passed it on to Israel's military leaders. When the Syrian king learned of this, he pursued Elisha and his servant to a town called Dothan.

**"Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked. 2 Kings 6:13-15**

Picture the scene. The servant wakes up. You can picture him rubbing his eyes; maybe there's a rooster crowing or animals. He steps outside, stretches his arms as he shakes sleep from his body, looks up, and sees that an imminent threat surrounds them. The enemy army advanced against Elisha during the night. While they were sleeping, while they were unaware, a "strong force" surrounded them.

The servant asks the question we all would ask - and do ask - when we're surrounded by night: "What shall we do?" You can hear the sense of helplessness. He did not ask for this army to surround them. He did not deserve it. But it's here. And he cries for help.

You and I have seasons of night. We have seasons when clouds cover the sun we previously enjoyed. We have seasons when we feel surrounded by an overwhelming force. You did not ask for it. You did not deserve it. But it's here.

And for some of us, that "overwhelming force" maybe be a struggle with mental health. As we talked about earlier, maybe it's psychological – a medical condition that disrupt our thinking and ability to relate to ourselves or others. Maybe it's physiological – a chemical dynamic that deeply impact our way of operating. Maybe it's spiritual - a sense of the loss of God.

Whatever the circumstance, the first step, like Elisha's servant, is to ask for help. We need to see and speak up about what surrounds us. It's frightening; it's not easy to talk about. But the first step, in the midst of helplessness, is to speak. The servant spoke in the midst of the overwhelming force that arrived at night. And Elisha responded with hope.

**"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." v.16**

My mind likes to imagine the scene and how I would have responded if I were Elisha's servant. I probably would have said, "Elisha, I realize you have a lot going for you. You are a prophet, you have a close relationship with God, and Israel seeks counsel from you. But apparently, math is not one of your strengths; there are two of us and 2,000 of them!"

Elisha's statement that there are more with them than those against them is stunning - and also seemingly absurd. When 2,000 surround two, 2,000 always win. When 2,000 attacks two, two have no chance. Two thousand always defeats two. But Elisha sees something different. In the midst of being surrounded by an overwhelming force, Elisha can see something stronger.

That's the struggle for us. We see what overwhelms us. In the midst of struggle, we're fighting to see something better. Elisha believed that God was on his side. It did not matter what army surrounded him, because he believed God would fight for him.

Maybe you need to hear this. Maybe you need to hear that because God is with you, whatever army surrounds you will not overtake you. Because God is with you, your side always outnumbered their side. Because God is with you, the unimaginable happens - two can be victorious against 2,000. Because God is with you, whatever happens at night cannot defeat the God of light. He is a rock that cannot be moved. He is a refuge for those who run to Him. He is a fortress for those who trust in Him. And hear this - there will never be a circumstance, there will never be a situation, there will never be a season, which He will ever leave you or forsake you because there is no one and nothing that can separate you from His love.

That is the God that Elisha saw. But here's the reality of life - not everyone sees that. Elisha's servant didn't see. Maybe you can't see hope. If so, listen to what Elisha does next.

**And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. v.17**

Elisha prayed for his servant. And what did he pray? "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." The servant wasn't physically blind, but he was surrounded by a strong force and could not see the deliverance of God. But now he sees that the deliverance of God has been right there, ready to act on his behalf.

Here's the piece for us: When you can't see, you need someone to help you see. The best, most loving thing you can do for someone else is to help them see the goodness, grace, and beauty of God. What if you prayed Elisha's prayer regularly for people in your world? "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." That's what we need more than anything - to see. As a pastor and friend, I've lost count of the hours spent sitting beside those who are struggling, hurting, grieving, or losing a grip on life. In those moments, the best thing I've prayed is for God to help them see again. When we can't see, we need to rely on others who can show us the deliverance of God.

Years ago, I led a Christmas Carol Service in a large cathedral in our town. One of my favorite moments was the end of the evening as we sang "Silent Night" and lit candles (like we do here on Christmas Eve). But there was something about that space with the lights as we waited for the candles to be lit. It was cavernous, dark, and cold. As the candlelight filled the room, it did not remove that cavernous or cold feeling. Rather, it symbolically represented the struggle that night will not win. Light has come in the person of Jesus.

This is what Jesus did in His ministry. One of the central actions of his ministry was to help the blind see. Some expend energy debating how it happened, or whether it happened. But they miss the point: Jesus was helping people see! Had people lost their physical sight? Yes. But people had also lost sight of God. In Jesus, they could now see.

I want you to fight to see when darkness surrounds you. Maybe the darkness is a struggle with mental health. Maybe the darkness is simply a low season. Whatever your circumstances, I want you to fight to see when darkness crowds out the light. And here's the challenge that I mentioned earlier. If darkness has surrounded you, I want you to talk to someone. It can be me, one of our elders (which you can find at <https://cpc.org/cpc/new-here/>), or you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

They can help in one of two ways. First, perhaps you need to speak up for yourself. Like Elisha's servant, you simply need to

say, "What should I do?" Hebrews 6 says that hope is an anchor for our soul. That doesn't mean the storms won't come, but when they do, you won't lose ground.

Second, perhaps you need to speak up for others. Elisha's servant couldn't see, so Elisha helped him. Maybe there is someone in your world that you need to help. Maybe, someone you need to have a hard conversation with to get them to the place where they can find help. Maybe it's simply asking how someone is doing, and not taking the easy answer. Listen to the burden that God has given to you for people. If you do this - speak up for ourselves or speak up for others - you will see, fresh again, that God is greater than whatever is against you.

### **William Cowper and His Pastor**

One last piece as we close, a story that I think can help us. In 18th-century England, a 35-year-old man named William Cowper moved to the town of Olney. Cowper was a poet and a religious person, and he also suffered from mental health issues. He suffered from depression. He attempted suicide several times, and he was hospitalized.

The reason that Cowper moved to Olney was to be near a pastor at the local church. This pastor befriended Cowper. He visited Cowper, took walks with Cowper, and sat by his side as Cowper struggled with the darkness for the next 11 years.

This pastor himself was a poet. They even collaborated on a hymnal (collection of poetry). In it was included a hymn that Cowper wrote called, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way." As I read this, I want you to hear the words of a man who suffered in the dark, but fought to see and had someone fighting to help him see. This is what Cowper wrote:

**God moves in a mysterious way  
his wonders to perform;  
he plants his footsteps in the sea,  
and rides upon the storm.  
Deep in unfathomable mines  
of never-failing skill  
he treasures up his bright designs,  
and works his sovereign will.  
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
the clouds ye so much dread  
are big with mercy, and shall break  
in blessings on your head.  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
but trust him for his grace;  
behind a frowning providence  
he hides a smiling face.  
His purposes will ripen fast,**

**unfolding every hour;  
the bud may have a bitter taste,  
but sweet will be the flow 'r.  
Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
and scan his work in vain;  
God is his own interpreter,  
and he will make it plain.**

I imagine Cowper, if he were here today, would say, keep fighting to see to beauty, grace, and deliverance of God. By the way, the pastor who befriended Cowper for 11 years? John Newton, who wrote probably the most famous song in history, "Amazing Grace." The man who wrote, "I was blind, but now I see," was now helping his friend to see. The One who is with you is greater than whatever surrounds. Don't give up. Speak up, for He will never give up on you.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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