

## Session 1: Anxiety about the Uncontrollable

***Main Idea:** God is in control of everything, even when things seem uncontrollable. Therefore, we can comfort our anxiety with this truth and trust God's perfect control of all things in the days ahead of us.*

### Open

The collective breath of the world has been arrested by government-enforced lockdowns, school cancellations, social distancing, fears of getting sick, and rising death tolls. COVID-19, the highly contagious virus spreading across the globe, has made most of our lives feel out of control and confusing. Anxiety may feel as natural as breathing under the current circumstances.

Jonathan Pokluda begins this series by acknowledging the lack of control many of us feel over our lives and encouraging us to overcome anxiety by trusting in the one who has always been in control, the God of the Bible.

### Show

Session 1: *Anxiety about the Uncontrollable* (10 minutes)

### Review

Jonathan asked the same questions many of us have wondered during the recent outbreak of COVID-19: What if this gets to me? What if it gets to my parents? What if one of my children contracts it?

**Have you shared similar concerns about the effects of the virus on your life? Who have you discussed those concerns with?**

**What are some of the emotions you have experienced over the past couple of weeks?**

Due to the current crisis, it has been common to hear people express fear and the feeling that they have lost control over their lives. **What are some tasks and activities that you no longer have been able to participate in due to current social restrictions (social distancing, closing of public spaces, school lockdowns, etc.)?**

**How is your family and local community attempting to adjust to the changes that have occurred in your life (new schedules, homeschooling, job changes, etc.)?**

**What about the COVID-19 pandemic has caused you the most anxiety?**

In the video Jonathan talked about the water hose of information coming at us every hour about the virus and how this information can often feed our fears and anxiety.

**What are some ways that you can be intentional to feed your faith instead of your fears during this current crisis?**

According to the video, whatever you feed grows. While it is important to be educated about the virus and how it is impacting our communities, it is more important to hear from God than Google.

**How can you and your family make sure you spend time hearing from God during this current crisis?**

### **Bible Exploration**

Read Matthew 6:25–34.

Jonathan used a helpful illustration about steering his daughter in a grocery cart during flu season to teach the lesson that, like his daughter who thought she was in control of the cart, control is an illusion. God is always in control of the whole world.

In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches a crowd of listeners this same lesson, saying those who believe in God should not be anxious about life because God will take care of us.

**Why should Jesus’s example of birds getting food provide comfort to his listeners about how God takes care of them?**

**Why should Jesus’s example of God’s concern for flowers growing in a field quench anxiety about whether God cares about us?**

In verse 34 Jesus challenges his listeners to “allow tomorrow to be anxious for itself,” or take our weeks one day at a time because each day has its own troubles. **What makes it difficult to practice allowing “tomorrow to be anxious for itself” each day while our communities reckon with the present and future effects of COVID-19?**

**What are some daily disciplines you can implement to fight anxiety with faith?**

### **Last Word**

When Christians claim that God is in control, it isn’t just a platitude to ignore scary circumstances or dismiss the chaos surrounding us. In fact, it is a proclamation of the most important reality of life, despite feeling that everything is out of our control.

In the video, Jonathan challenged us to realize that the current COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity to choose who you trust. **What are some examples that he gives from the Bible that God is trust-worthy?**

**How should God always being in control impact how you think about the current crisis?**

**How should God being perfect and trustworthy influence how you process anxiety about the days ahead?**

### **Deeper Walk**

**Read:** Read Matthew 6:25–34.

**Pray:** Pray to believe in God's power to control and care for all things in your life affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Allow for your prayers to build trust in God's ability and expertise to handle the present and the future.

**Evaluate:** Slow down this week and evaluate if you have spent more time feeding your faith or feeding your fears concerning COVID-19.

**Create:** Create something that helps you practice letting go of trying to control everything. Take this opportunity to create new daily rhythms that keep your family spiritually, mentally, and physically healthy.

## Session 2: Anxiety about the Economy

***Main Idea:** The economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic appear bleak and are causing many families to grow anxious and think about self-preservation. God has, however, given us an obligation to put others before ourselves.*

### Open

While causing life-threatening challenges in thousands of people's lives all over the world, COVID-19 has also begun to send ripple effects throughout society that threaten to cripple the economy—both in the United States and around the world.

In this session, Jonathan addresses the anxiety surrounding the changing economic landscape and encourages Christians to prioritize loving our neighbors over preserving earthly riches.

### Show

Session 2: *Anxiety about the Economy* (8 minutes)

### Review

As the days go on, the current crisis and its impact have both ups and downs. The news cycle is filled with heroic stories of healthcare workers saving lives and families enjoying extended time together, coupled with grim news about the rising number of COVID-19 cases and deaths.

**How have you and your family primarily received information about the current crisis (social media, news channel, etc.)?**

**How have you felt about the way the media has covered the crisis?**

Jonathan used the experience riding roller coasters to illustrate different ways people experience the current pandemic. Some people trust the “roller coaster” and believe that wherever the crisis is headed, one day they will get off and be okay.

However, many others are like the would-be riders who exit off the “chicken ramp” before the ride starts because they are scared and anxious about what's coming.

**When it comes to your own feelings about the economic effects of the current crisis, do you feel like someone who trusts the roller coaster or is panicked and ready to get off?**

Government data indicated recently that over three million people are currently filing for unemployment in the United States. **Has anyone in your immediate family or church community faced any economic challenges during this time?**

**What are some ways you can be praying for and actively supporting those who may have suffered job loss or may be facing other economic effects of the current crisis?**

### **Bible Exploration**

Read Luke 12:16–36.

In the video, Jonathan referenced a passage in Luke where Jesus tells the parable about a rich man obtaining an abundant harvest. **Why does the Lord refer to the rich man as “fool” for how he handled his wealth in the parable?**

**What does Jesus’s lesson in Luke teach us about the importance of wealth compared to human life?**

**Amid the current economic circumstances, what does it mean for us to focus on being “rich toward God” during this season?**

Read Mark 10:40–45.

Jonathan recounted the story of an ancient Christian figure by the name of Dionysius and his account of how Christians responded to plagues that overwhelmed Rome in the third century AD.

According to Jonathan, the church grew tremendously in this time due to the faithful witness of believers risking their own comforts to serve the pagan Roman society. **How does this example from church history illustrate what Jesus says about serving others in Mark 10:45?**

**In a time where it is easy to only focus on ourselves and our families, why is it important to be mindful of finding ways to serve others during the COVID-19 crisis?**

In the video, Jonathan suggested sending messages and grocery shopping for those who can’t go for themselves as ways to serve people during this pandemic. **What are some other ideas for serving others that you have already done or could plan to do?**

### **Last Word**

It is normal to feel a great sense of uncertainty under the constraints of city lockdowns, quarantines, and social distancing. In these circumstances it is challenging to just get through each day but maybe even more challenging to consider the importance of loving your neighbor as yourself.

During this current crisis, one of the ways Christians can love our neighbors is by abiding by the instructions of governing authorities to slow the spread of the virus.

**Since technology is a primary way of interacting with your neighbors under these circumstances, what are some creative ways you have seen or attempted to use technology to love others?**

**How can emphasizing serving others during this season help you avoid becoming overly anxious about the pending economic decline?**

### **Deeper Walk**

**Read:** Read Mark 10:40–45.

**Pray:** Spend time praying for the financial implications of the current crisis on your country and local communities. Reach out to people and find out specific ways you can pray and support their families during this crisis.

**Evaluate:** Evaluate your daily routine and decide how it can be modified to incorporate serving others during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Create:** Create a list of people to serve and find specific ways to use the internet, letters, and cell phones to encourage them.

## Session 3: Anxiety about Isolation

**Main Idea:** *Social distancing is necessary but that doesn't mean it's an easy pill to swallow, especially because of the reality of loneliness. Nonetheless, God promises to always be with us and comfort our anxiety about being lonely.*

### Open

As the virus continues to spread, it has forced millions of us to be isolated from our friends, coworkers, and family members. The practice of social distancing leaves us all longing for hugs and face-to-face talks with loved ones.

Jonathan addresses the anxiety surrounding social distancing and loneliness in this session and reminds us of God's promise to be present regardless of our circumstances or whoever else is, or is not, around us.

### Show

Session 3: *Anxiety about Isolation* (7 minutes)

### Review

The current crisis has disrupted the normal activity of the whole world in only a few months. One of the hardest aspects of this pandemic is isolation. It is a required practice to keep those infected with the virus away from those most at risk because of other medical complications. But isolation can breed loneliness.

**How have you and your family managed to follow social distancing suggestions from doctors and government officials?**

**Are you naturally an extrovert or introvert? How do you think your personality type impacts feelings of loneliness?**

**What have you done to try to stay engaged with others outside of your home during this period of social distancing?**

In the video, Jonathan used Jesus's agonizing words on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" as evidence that Jesus identifies with loneliness. However, throughout the Bible God promises his people that, "He will never leave us or forsake us." **How does God's ability to be present with us even while we are isolated help us during this time of crisis?**

**What does it look like to trust God to be present with you, especially when not many other people can be around?**

Jonathan encouraged us that this unique time with minimal community gatherings is a perfect time to focus on our relationships with the Father. **What are you doing to build your relationship with God during this time?**

Jonathan also discussed how Christians have a great ability to turn worries into prayers. **What are some concerns about COVID-19 that you can turn into prayers during this time of crisis?**

Use the energy you would put toward worry toward prayer.

### **Bible Exploration**

Read Philippians 4:4–7.

**How do Paul's words to the Philippian church challenge our tendency to worry?**

In the passage, Paul encourages the church that God transcends what our minds can comprehend about our present situations. God can handle everything that we bring to him in prayer and supplication. **How might loneliness be related to worrying and the need for prayer during this time of crisis?**

Jonathan used a story about a young boy who was trapped in a closet and panicked because he felt like no one could hear him. The young boy thankfully was heard by his father and he immediately stopped worrying and crying as soon as his father was able to get to him, even though he was still in the dark closet.

**What does this story teach us about the importance of a father's presence?**

**Can you remember another time in your life where prayer brought you the peace of God's presence?**

### **Last Word**

It seems as if God himself has pushed the pause button on most of our lives in a way that makes us aware of not only how small we are, but also how much we need him. In the video, Jonathan encouraged us that God is always listening and turning to him during this crisis should be our initial instinct to combat anxiety and loneliness.

**What can you do to make sure that this extended time away from our normal communal gatherings does not make us far from God?**

**Although the present COVID-19 pandemic can incite much fear, how can our fears and anxieties be seen as a gift that can push us closer to God?**



**Deeper Walk**

**Read:** Psalm 46 and reflect on what it looks like to be still and recognize God's power and sovereignty.

**Pray:** Pray every time you feel lonely and anxious. Make sure you use technology (phones, email, social media) to express to others how you are feeling and invite them to pray with you.

**Evaluate:** Take the time to evaluate whether or not you have been using this time to build your relationship with God.

**Create:** Create daily rhythms for prayer and connecting with friends and family to combat loneliness.

## Session 4: Anxiety When the Church Can't Meet

***Main Idea:** While our churches are not able to gather physically, it should not make us anxious that God will not preserve his church through these turbulent times. Local churches must be intentional to remain connected and get through the pandemic together.*

### Open

The church is the gathering of God's people. However, as governing authorities become increasingly concerned about the spread of COVID-19, many churches have not gathered together in weeks and are wondering what the absence will do their communities.

In this final session, Jonathan provides a calming word to the anxiety surrounding the lack of church gatherings and offers pastoral wisdom on how Christians can stay faithful to God and each other during these times.

### Show

Session 4: *Anxiety When the Church Can't Meet* (6 minutes)

### Review

In Matthew 16, Jesus gives his disciples a prophetic assurance that God's people will not be defeated in the end, not even by the Gates of Hades.

The disciples were confused by Jesus's words in a similar way to how many Christians may be confused now on how the church will overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.

**What are some of your fears about how the crisis will affect your local church?**

**What are some of the ways that your church community has tried to confront some these fears together?**

While we long for the day where this global pandemic is behind us and we can gather physically with our congregations again, the advancements in technology over the past twenty years have provided incredible supplemental ways to interact with people while we are apart.

**What have been some of the challenges your church community has faced due to the lack of normal church gatherings throughout the week?**

In the video, Jonathan suggested churches need to have a plan and be innovative about ways to keep their communities connected. **What has your church community done to be strategic and innovative in finding different ways to gather together under the current restrictions?**

Although we would all much rather be able to have Sunday service and other church events in person, online platforms like video chats, email, and social media have many capabilities to serve the church well. **Are there any unique benefits to transitioning your typical church programming and community engagement to online platforms in this season? Why or why not?**

**How can your church community use technology to study God's Word together?**

While technology is a blessing and becoming essential to most of our social connections, technology also can be a cancerous source of sinful temptations.

The internet and the various devices we use to access it has both the power to draw us into deeper intimacy with God or pull us further from God and his people through mindless web searching, pornographic images, or TV bingeing.

**How have you managed the amount of time you spend on online, outside of work-related tasks, during this time where many of us are on "shelter in place" restrictions at home?**

**What are some protective measures you can implement to guard your mind and heart from sinful temptations related to your use of the internet?**

In the video, Jonathan reminded us that whatever you feed in this time will grow. **What are some faith goals you can commit to feeding during this crisis?**

### **Bible Exploration**

Read Hebrews 10:23–25.

Jonathan used Hebrews 10:25 to emphasize the importance of gathering with other believers in Christ on a regular basis. Even though we cannot meet in person, the admonition to "not forsake gathering together" is as important now as it was when the writer of Hebrews penned the letter.

**Why do you think the message to "not forsake" gathering was an important message for the writer of Hebrews to communicate and for Christians to hear today?**

**What would it mean for your church, during this current crisis, for people to forsake the gathering?**

**How could you help people who seem to be drifting away due to the lack of physical gatherings?**

## **Last Word**

Christians don't have to sacrifice community because of crisis. In fact, more than any other time in recent history, the church has a tremendous responsibility to display our most valuable identity markers: union with Christ and unity with one another.

By the grace of God there are phones, computers, smart watches, iPads, and other forms of technology that are perfectly fit to serve God's people in this time of crisis, especially to meet people's needs.

**How are you going to use technology to enrich your church community during this season?**

**What are some examples of church unity that can be put on display for your church community to feel the love of Christ and to let God's love be known to outsiders looking in?**

**Are there any needs that you and your family can commit to trying to regularly meet within your church during this time?**

## **Deeper Walk**

**Read:** Read Hebrews 10:23–25 and Matthew 16.

**Pray:** Pray for the members of your church. Be intentional to reach out to people and ask for prayer requests and needs that may be available for you to meet.

**Evaluate:** Think strategically about how your church members and staff will stay connected throughout the duration of this crisis. Evaluate best practices for community engagement and seek out ideas from other churches of a similar demographic to your own for help (size, location, etc.).

**Create:** Create daily and weekly rhythms for reaching out to people in your church community. Cooperate with your church leaders to utilize group chats, Zoom video calls, and other platforms for encouragement and fellowship.