

“Do Not Worry”

Philippians 4:6–7

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We will be talking about worry/anxiety in this study. Different people struggle with anxiety at different levels and at different times but what I'd like for you to do is to think specifically about something in your life. So I will start by giving you two to three questions to prime the pump of your heart? Perhaps you do struggle with worry a lot and my question to you is, what is the main thing that you tend to worry about the most? When does worry tend to come up the most repeatedly in your life? Maybe you don't struggle with worry a lot so my question to you is, what has been the biggest thing historically that you have worried about when you have struggled with worry? Maybe you are worrying about something right now. I want you to try and think about something very specifically that you have worried about or are worrying about. Now I want to read the text for this study.

Philippians 4:6–7 says [6] *do not be anxious (worry) about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

The first thing I want to do is define worry. Part of the way I want to define it is that it is the outworking of pride. We might not think of that at first glance. We may tend to think of the sin of worry as a sin of weakness or overwhelmed or has a victim mentality. I have so much stress in life and I just can't live up to it, poor ole me, look at me I'm worrying. I think if you drilled down into the heart of what worry really is then what you will find is a spirit and attitude of pride. These are pretty radical words. Paul doesn't really say most worry is really bad but he says 'all' worry is bad. He says 'do not worry about anything.' All worry is sin.

We will look at several different passages in this study so now I'd like to look at Matthew 6. Here is a famous passage from Christ about worry. Matthew 6:25–34 says [25] *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. [34] “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.* The point of this passage is ‘do not worry.’

There is a proper way to be concerned about things in life. Certainly there is a proper way to care about people in events that are going on around you. There is a really clear example on this back in Philippians 4. Philippians 4:10 says [10] *I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now*

at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Certainly from this there is a proper way to be concerned about people but how do we distinguish the difference between Godly concern, righteous care and sinful anxiety?

Godly care/concern has an attitude that says I'm going to do everything I can to help. I will be faithful and do my part but at the end of the day I'm not God and I'm going to leave the results to God. Sinful worry has the attitude that I am going to do everything I can but I feel the burden on my back to guarantee the results and that's a pressure that none of us was ever meant to bear. It will crush you if you try to bear it. Ultimately although it seems like a sin of weakness in one sense, it is a form of really gross pride. Worry is really a practical way to say to God 'I'm god and I've got this. I'm in charge. I'll take this burden off your back. Let me handle it.

When you are in a situation where you are fretting about this one concern, event or person, at some level you are believing in your heart I could run at least this little corner of the universe better than God. I don't like the way He is doing it. I think I know what's best and I think I have a better plan. We would never mouth those words out loud but I'm sure that is what we could be thinking at some point.

This past week I was with fifth graders who took a trip to Washington DC. Near the end of the trip my son had a backpack with all the stuff he had been collecting from the trip to make a scrap book with and he was all excited about it. There is some stress that goes into all of that and on the last day he lost his backpack at a museum. He realizes it later when we are on the bus and far away from the museum. He told me he lost it and I realize there is nothing we can do at this point. I don't care that much about the scrap book but I do love my son. There was nothing really valuable in it and no one would probably steal it. We'd have to wait until the next day to call about it. So I told my son 'hey buddy, we'll handle it.' It didn't work because here came the tears and panic. 'What are we going to do?' In that moment he didn't trust me. He didn't think I would handle it. After a few minutes and by God's grace I stayed in the Spirit and was able to convince him that it would be okay. When he really thought that his dad was hearing him and concerned about it and would take care of it, he calmed down.

I'll tell you more of this story in a minute but at some level when you are worrying there is a sense in which you are looking up, not to your human father, but to your heavenly Father and He is saying to you 'I've got it.' Do you really believe He is sovereign and in control of the universe? If so, act like it. Don't worry. Let's look at I Peter 5. I want to show you that this is a theme throughout Scripture and not just one small verse to memorize. Worry is a sin and it's a big deal. I think I Peter 5 shows us a way that worry is a form of pride. Here Peter is probably thinking back on his last night with Christ, when he had blown in and so here he is exhorting younger men in the church to be humble.

I Peter 5:6-8 says [6] *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, [7] casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. [8] Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* I want to point out at least two things from this passage.

Paul is talking about pride versus humility and he says that one of the cures for pride is to take off all the anxiety and cast it on Him. Anxiety is almost synonymous with pride. Then he tells us in the next verse that Satan prowls around like a lion looking for someone to devour. Notice that he does not give that warning in the context of sexual sin even though it could be applied very broadly. If He had put this in the context of sexual sin or greed it might be easier to

see this but He says in the midst of pride and anxiety Satan is waiting to devour us to pull us away from our heavenly Father. At deep levels of the heart, we're basically saying we don't trust God.

Again I Peter 5:7 says [7] *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.* Once I was able to convince my son that I cared for him he got calm. When we start to really believe at heart level that we have a Father who sits on a throne, has all power, and rules the whole universe, with one of His main goals being to care for me. Then it gets real easy to say we're not going to worry. He has got it. He is going to take care of it.

So number one, don't treat worry like it's one of those respectable sins and it's not that big of a deal. I think that is what most of us tend to do where we think we have bigger sins to deal with. Worry is a big deal and we need to be serious about calling it what it is – sin, arrogance, an affront to God's majesty, sovereignty, kindness, care and love. Then we need to repent of it. So we need to define worry in the right way.

So how do we defeat it? Defining it is not good enough. We defeat worry by prayer. As soon as my son and I got off the bus and into our room I asked my son if he wanted to pray about the situation of losing his backpack. He did and it changed his attitude. It was partially daddy but I really think when he prayed his attitude changed. He prayed a short prayer in asking the Lord to protect his stuff and to bring it back to him and when he finished he told me 'I think it will be alright Dad.' If you're wondering if he got it back, he did. He'll get his 'A' on his scrapbook and the world is right again. It's not always that easy, is it?

I don't want to over simplify the Christian life. God is always big and powerful but sometimes He chooses in an instant to take worry out of our heart. There are other times that you feel like when you're praying it's not working. Have you ever been there? John Calvin says that one of the favorite places that Satan likes to attack us is when we're in a place where we're crying out to God and for whatever reason God is delaying. That is when the devil in a sense is able to whisper in our minds 'He is not really a good heavenly Father is He? Look at what you are asking for. You are asking for something really good. You're not asking for a brand new car for your just asking for peace in this situation with a family member to be reconciled. God is not doing it.' That is when doubt starts to creep in and we ask 'does He really care for me?' So we can't just say prayer in some easy, simple way. We have to be patient in prayer and persevere in prayer. Let's look at Psalm 3.

We could probably choose any one of the Psalms here to look at, especially David's. There is a pattern to many of David's psalms. Most of them start with some type of problem or even panic but by the end he tends to be at a place of peace. What happens in the middle? I want to give you a brief context to Psalm 3. This was prayed when Absalom, his son, decided to rebel. He wanted to kill his father and take the kingdom for himself. He had a very large force with him. David with a smaller group of mighty men were camping out for them. This has got to be a terrifying position to be in with your own son wanting to kill you and overthrow your kingdom. Logically at the human level, this is a great time to be worried right? Let's look at how he prays in Psalm 3.

Psalm 3:1–2 says [1] *O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; [2] many are saying of my soul, "There is no salvation for him in God."* Selah Here David is wrestling with the fact of whether God will come through or not but then he goes on.

Psalm 3:3–4 says [3] *But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. [4] I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill.* Selah Part of what good prayer is, is that it includes meditation and preaching the truth to yourself. Verse 4 is

in the past tense for in the past he cried to the Lord and in the past He delivered him. David is probably sitting there sweating with worry and fear and this seems vaguely familiar to him because he has been in some situations like this before.

David went through similar situations when as a young man he was being chased by Saul, who also wanted to kill him. He looks back on this and realizes that God has delivered him every single time. Perhaps we've heard the phrase 'preach the Gospel to yourself' and I would say here is a helpful phrase that probably comes out of these psalms 'preach your own history to yourself.' Learn to look at your own life and the past promises, deliverances and where God has specifically come through in your own life. This builds hope and we see this with David in this psalm. David preaches the truth to himself and then he starts to praise and worship God. Let's look at what the rest of Psalm 3 says.

Psalm 3:5–8 says [5] *I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me. [6] I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. [7] Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. [8] Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people!* Selah

When you persevere in prayer and combine it with preaching the truth to yourself as you remind yourself of His past promises and deliverances, it has a way of lifting your soul. It is a tangible experience. You start to feel different. If you were waiting for your own son to come and kill you how would you sleep the night before? David says here that he got a great night's sleep and that was because he wasn't worried after he persevered in prayer. It's a persevering prayer. It's a patient prayer.

Again, this is a theme that comes out repeatedly in the Bible. I want to go back to the two New Testament texts we've looked at in this study. Philippians 4:6 says [6] *do not be anxious (worry) about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* This isn't a formula, meaning if you're praying about worry and you leave off the thanksgiving part God is going to withhold His peace from you. He is saying that if part of your prayer is for help and then you include thanksgiving for all He had done for you it is amazing how He changes your attitude.

Whenever my kids are in a bad mood I tell them 'ok make a list of everything that you don't like in your life' and they have never been able to fill up more than one piece of paper. Perhaps they just get bored of the exercise after a while but then I tell them to make a list of everything about their life that they do like. If they are really in the bad mood then of course they say nothing is good about it. I tell them to go watch the news for about five minutes then make your list and if they don't want to then I will say 'give me your phone' and then they go watch the news. You know they will hear something bad that has happened to someone or to many. Then they make their list and many times on that list is that they are thankful for America, the Bible, Briarwood Christian School, having a mom and dad, for health. Then I will ask them about some of the things on the list they don't like, like our small TV and they will say 'I'm fine dad.' Thank you. There is a time that when we get our eyes off of ourselves and our circumstances of how it changes everything. Literally something changes in our hearts.

Here is my personal definition of worry. Worry is a conversation that you have with yourself about something that you can't do anything about. You get to the end of the day and you have been faithful with all you know to do but it's still not resolved. So you lay there thinking about the things you can't do anything about – that's worry. I think a fair definition of prayer is a conversation with God that He can do everything about. So in one sense the key to

fighting worry is really easy for you just bring God into the conversation that you are having in your mind.

Here is a personal example. Part of the responsibility of working with Campus Outreach is raising money and there have been times that it gets to the end of the year and all the money that is supposed to come in hasn't yet I feel I've been faithful to do what I was supposed to do. I don't tend to struggle with worry a ton but this can feel like a heavy weight to the point where my wife can see it in my countenance. My wife and I talk about it but I go to bed and lay there with my mind just spinning, like a rat is running a wheel that won't stop. You can't stop it. This verse in Philippians will come to my mind. I think, 'I'm sinning, I'm worrying, I'm arrogant, I'm trying to be God. I think I've been sinlessly faithful and I've done everything I know I can do. I have been doing this for a long time now and You've always come through. I've never ended the year with a deficit. It has come pretty close sometimes but we've always made it. So thank You Lord for the past years and I pray You would do it again.' Sometimes I might have to pray like that for a half hour or longer but eventually a calm comes over me and I go to sleep to the point that I wake up the next morning in a really great mood. My wife will say 'did you figure out what you're going to do?' I would say 'I didn't figure out anything.' 'So what changed?' I got my eyes off of myself and back on God. He has always come through in the past and He'll come through again. Learn to turn worry into prayer.

Again I Peter 5:6 says [6] *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.* If you're thinking and meditating on that verse a question that comes to mind is 'when is the proper time?' He doesn't tell us that and again we just have to have faith. When it is right for Him to lift us up He'll do it. So I patiently persevere in prayer until God decides to change the situation but I trust Him because He cares for me.

Again, Philippians 4:6-7 says [6] *do not be anxious (worry) about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

You really have to displace worry. Do you remember the weird parable Jesus told? It is the one where He says if you have a demon and you cast it out, sweeping everything to get it clean but you don't put anything else in to replace it, the demon will just come back with seven more demons. One of the points Jesus is trying to make here is that our soul will not abide a vacuum. Something will fill us up and if you're not filled with worry and I'm in charge something else is going to come in there. It's not enough to pray once and get through the situation. Something has to fill your soul, like peace.

Philippians 4:6 is a command for us not to worry and instead of worrying we are to pray and pray with thanksgiving. So this verse is telling us things we need to do. It is our part to be faithful. Philippians 4:7 is not a command but a promise. It is a wonderful promise. If you're like me there are some promises in the Bible that you'll say 'yes I believe it' mentally and academically because I ascribe to the whole Bible but practically I have a really hard time experiencing it and believing it sometimes.

It's kind of like when Jesus says 'ask whatever you wish and it shall be given' and you think 'ok I believe that' but I'm still wrestling in my heart with how it actually works out in the real world in 21st century America. It doesn't always feel like anything I ask I get. I could probably preach a sermon on that verse and explain it but experientially it doesn't always feel true to me. Philippians 4:7 is one of those verses where I can say it feels true to me. Philippians 4:6-7 are the top two verses I quote most often and most of the time I'm talking to God and

myself when I'm quoting it. I do this every time I feel worry or a weight. Lord, You told me if I would pray and be thankful You would send peace.

Charles Spurgeon said any time you quote Scripture back to God in prayer it's like taking to Him a blank check that He signed for He'll cash it in. You might have to persevere for a while but He'll cash it in. Are you trusting the Lord and His goodness to keep this promise, looking unto Him to do the part that you can't do? Are you being honest about being a weak person?

Some sins have very practical, tangible ways that you can protect yourself from that sin. Let's say you're struggling with drunkenness. You could get really extreme and say 'there will never be liquor in my house again, I'll never go to a bar, I'll never even go to a restaurant that has alcohol for I am going to do everything I can to stay away from it.' That will make a really practical difference in your life. Andy Stanley makes this great point when he say nobody plans to worry but worry is one of those things that sneaks up on us. If we're really going to get free of worry God has to do a supernatural work. We have to do our part to be faithful, pray, thank and preach truth to ourselves but God has to show up and do His part. This is a promise we can claim. We can take it to the bank of heaven and cash it in.

The context of Philippians here is that Paul is in prison, thinking of a guard at the prison door and the imagery he is using about persevering in faithful prayer, God will eventually appoint a guard outside the door of your heart. Then He says 'no worry is allowed in here.' The promise of peace is that it will surpass all understanding. It won't always make sense to you. There are times when I wake up the next morning after praying about something and I don't know what is going to happen but I feel peace. God is in control. I'm not in control. I don't know what He is going to do but it will be good. It will be better than what I would have done. It is peace that is real, sweet and enjoyable. God fills you with that kind of peace when you persevere.

There may be some reading this today that have heard what I've said and believe it but you think 'I'm dealing with something so difficult in my life right now that it feels harder than even what David went through.' You also might be thinking that David's situation only lasted a few days and you have been dealing with a terrible marriage for the past ten years or an abusive relationship. You're not sure if these cute little tricks of persevering in prayer, being thankful and preaching truth to yourself will really make a difference. Or some of you might be thinking when it comes to preaching history to yourself you may think you don't have any real signs of God's faithfulness and deliverance in your life.

If you're a Christian part of your history is the Gospel. It is what happened over 2000 years ago on the cross. Let's just think about that for a minute. If ever a human being has cause to worry it was the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever level of care and concern you can have that gets right up to the line of sinful worry but doesn't cross the boundary that is what Jesus had in the Garden of Gethsemane. Was it not? He said to them 'My soul is troubled to the point of death.' It was almost as if He was having a nervous breakdown. What did He do? He prayed, not just once or twice but three times. He persevered in prayer. Seems like God gave Him a measure of peace to get up, go through the arrest, the trial and then He gets to the cross. God sent an angel to minister to Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. On the cross He could have called angels to save Himself but then He couldn't have saved us.

Then He hung there even when the Father literally forsook Him, where we ought to be forsaken. In the blackness of that night with literal hell on earth, if anyone should have been worried it should have been Him. What did He do? He prayed. Even when He didn't feel a

connection to God He couldn't call Him 'My Abba' for He had no experience of the Father but He still had faith, 'You are My God.' He didn't just pray any prayer for He quoted from the Psalms. He was meditating on truth and preaching truth to Himself. How long did that last? It lasted hours but before He died He got back to a place of peace. One of the last things He said was 'Father into Thy hands I commit My Spirit.' That was that trust – I know You care for Me. I rest. I have been faithful.

We can't be God. We can't even bear the weight of our own soul to save it, much less try to bear the weight of all the events going on in the universe. If we look at Christ as our example He is a great example of what it looks like to turn worry into prayer and to be free to get peace but more importantly to look at Him as our Savior. Meditate on that, preach the Gospel to ourselves and pray in light of that and that will begin to turn our worst panic into peace. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You're such a great and glorious God! We will literally spend all of eternity plumbing the depths of who You are, Your majesty, Your goodness. I pray that we could start that now. I pray we would start in whatever situation we find ourselves in now, even if it is a black, dark night of real pain. Help us not succumb to the lies that You don't care for us but that we would hold onto truth through patient, persevering prayer and preaching the truth to ourselves as we pray to You. I pray Lord that the promises of Your Word would burn, shine and be real and that we would experience the truth of Philippians 4:7 and You would get glory and pleasure from it, in Christ's Name, Amen.