

Washing our Hearts of Worry **Philippians 4:6-7**

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Last week we looked at fear and how to disinfect it from our hearts with gospel truth. Outright fear is the particularly destructive side of the terror spectrum, and no doubt some of us struggle with panic in times like this. Most, if not all of us, deal with a low-grade anxiety. I find myself reminiscing of happy times when we had people in our home, or we could go with the girls to a park without concern. Those days were just two weeks ago. Then poof! They are gone at least for a while.

What has replaced them? Perhaps you can relate to this: I said one night to Jennifer as we were going to bed, "I kind of dread looking at the news in the morning. For quite a while now, all the news has been bad."

Now, not *all* news has been bad; how about some good news? One member of our church was doing very badly with a likely lethal version of the coronavirus. Many were praying for him this week. It didn't look good. Now he's home. He's with his family. He's much improved. Praise God for answered prayer for this family. I'll share more later. But it's been mostly bad news every day. Every day the stock market is lower. Every day the infection and death counts are higher. Every day the restrictions on life are stricter. Every day is less like the normal days of old.

In the limited times out, at the grocery store or gas station, have you noticed any difference in the countenance of people? Everyone wonders if the other person is a carrier. Not a lot of smiling around town. Why? This is the human response to crisis and trials: at worst fear; at best low-grade anxiety.

We likely realize that Christians shouldn't be fearful. But how about worry? How about mid-grade anxiety? In difficult times these almost seem virtuous. Yet God has a totally different approach to difficult circumstances. Here it is,

"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 peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 4:6-7 ESV)

This passage revolves around two complementary themes—prayer in verse 6 and peace in verse 7. Please notice the order. Prayer, then peace. That's important.

The Sinful Nature of Worry (Verse 6)

"Do not be anxious about anything."

Paul, that's easy to say, hard to do. Anxiety is hardly a new concept to any of us. The root of the word comes from "care." And there is a kind of "care" that is good and desirable. Paul uses this same word in other places (2:20) describing his care for them or his care for the churches. Caring is good. Festering cares are bad. Obsessive cares are bad. That's anxiety. Present, active, imperative. *"Do not be anxious.... about anything."*

You see that we have the words “anything” and “everything.” Both are broad words. What is not included in “anything”? Nothing. Most people don’t worry about everything, but few people can say they don’t worry about anything. So, there is something *not to do* with anything and something *to do* with everything. What we are not to do is worry. Why is worry wrong? For some, this is a badge of honor. We think it means we really care about something or somebody. “At least I care enough to worry!” Worry is never a virtue and here is why.

Worry blasphemes God because of what it is believing about itself. It is believing that it can, through this obsessive care and concern, control the object or outcome.

Worry denies the sovereignty of God

How many of you worry about the sun coming up in the morning? Why not? You can’t control that, so you don’t worry about it. How many of you worry about the stock market? Can you control that? Why do you worry about it? Anyone worried about a medical condition? Can you control that? Anybody worried about dying? Can you control that?

In fact, when you really get right down to it, how many of the things that we worry about do we really have any control over? Ultimately, nothing. So, what does our worry do? It wants to control what it can’t control, and it is dissatisfied with God’s right to rule and govern in the way that he sees fit. Oswald Sanders calls it “unconscious blasphemy.”

Worry denies the goodness of God

Have you ever worried that something might turn out to be too wonderful? Too good? Does the single woman worry in her heart, “What if my future husband is too wonderful”? Does the parent worry, “What if my kids turn out too godly”? We never worry about it being better than we think. We always worry it will be worse. No good. At least not as good as I think it should be.

And yet, Romans 8:28 makes a definitive promise to every Christian, God works out everything for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. Why does God always turn out everything for good? Because God is good.

“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Psalm 118:1) The Lord is good. This is repeated over and over again in the Psalms. Everything that God does is good and, when added to his sovereignty, guarantees no matter what life throws at us, God ultimately intends good. Remember the words of Joseph in Genesis 50:20, *“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”*

When I worry, I am saying in my heart to God, *I don’t think that you are in control and if you are in control, I don’t think that you are good. So, I am going to trust my own ability to fix problems, calculate solutions, and define what is good for me.* And that is sin and it is not to be done in the heart of the Christian.

The Prayer that Kills Worry (Verse 6)

“...but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

Anxious for nothing. Prayer in everything. Never worry. Always pray. There are three words used for prayer here: prayers, petitions, and requests.

- **Prayers** – general word for talking to God.
- **Petitions (supplication)** – this word is more specific and means entreaty. This is a word of urgency and need. It's the difference between conversation and a cry for help.
- **Requests** – asking for things. When are we do this? In everything!

Paul also adds that these prayers are to be done in a spirit of thanksgiving. This is critical as thanksgiving acknowledges God's right to do what he wants. When I am thankful to God, I am submissive to his will. When I am thankful in prayer, I am acknowledging his goodness. Thankful prayers kill worry at the root by reminding us that God is in control and that he is good.

- When I am anxious, I am refusing to give up control. When I am praying, I am acknowledging God's right to control.
- When I am worrying, I am believing in my ability to know what is good. When I am praying, I am trusting in God's ability to define good.

Get this. God WANTS us to make requests to him. He WANTS us to come needy to him.

"[Cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

Look at the life of our Lord and see from his boldness and reliance on his heavenly Father that God is not afraid of our honest cries for help. Rather, he is glorified in them and wants us to come to him and promises to hear and WILL always answer our prayer according to his goodness which permeates every thought and inclination that he has toward us.

He is not honored by our worry. He is not honored by our fear.

One of my earliest memories is when we were visiting a Christian camp. I was maybe three or four and my dad carried me out on the long dock into the lake. From my vantage point, that dock seemed incredibly narrow and slender. I cried out, "Don't drop me Daddy!" All I could see was the water. I was afraid. My fear didn't honor him, but I knew who to ask for help.

And so many of us are dominated by fear and worry over things that we cannot control. I said in a previous sermon, *pandemics put the modern man out of sorts because pandemics put the modern man out of control.*

Our lives are controlled by that for which, about which, after which, before which and concerning which we care.¹

Some people never try the better way and they dismiss it with, *prayers don't work!* Does worry? Has anxiety ever helped any situation? Never. Why is it so universally embraced? There is a better way and it begins with fighting worry at its root—who is in control and who is good? If the answer is me, I will be dominated by worry. If it is God, an entirely new reality blossoms in my life.

¹*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* 1964-c1976. Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin. (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (Vol. 4, Page 591-592). Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7)

What kind of peace is he talking about? Not the objective peace between God and man that is justification. Romans 5:1, *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God."*

That is another peace. ***But in order to have the peace OF God, you have to have peace WITH God.*** If your soul does not know peace, one explanation could be that you have never made peace with God. You are still his enemy. You have not signed the peace treaty. And God has offered a peace treaty through the blood of his own Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross.

But that is not the peace described here. The peace of God described here is the opposite of human anxiety. It is the peace of the heart. The calm assurance that all will be well. That sense of security that every man and woman longs for.

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:26-27 NIV)

"Peace is the smile of God reflected in the soul of the believer. It is the heart's calm after Calvary's storm. It is the firm conviction that he who spared not his own Son will surely, also, along with him, freely give us all things." (William Hendriksen)²

It is the peace that comes from God, through his Holy Spirit, as we refuse to give in to fear and trust that God is in control. It is a fruit of the Spirit and the sister to joy.

But why should I want this instead of plain old worry?

"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7 ESV, emphasis added)

Transcending understanding does not mean that it is mystical, which is the way this is too often read. The word for *transcends* means, "far surpasses." The word for *knowing* means "the mind mulling over." In other words,

The peace of God far surpasses the benefits(?) of worry.

All of my attempts to control and to figure out and to calculate produce a certain reality in my heart. That reality is puny in its benefit when compared to the inner emotional security of trusting in God's control and goodness.

God's peace is better than obsessive planning. God's peace is better than controlling. His peace is better than manipulation. Peace is better than worry. Peace is better than fear. Peace is better than anxiety. The peace of God far surpasses anything that man's attempts to control his life can produce.

And not only that, it has a defensive role to play. It actually guards our hearts and minds. Literally, it's a military word. "To defend against a hostile invasion." The peace of God is like

² William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians*, p. 195.

secret service agents encircling our hearts and minds. Sunglasses. Talking into their wrist. Bulges under their black suits, we all know what those are. Snipers on the rooftops. What are they guarding against?

They are guarding my heart and mind against the first inclination to question God's right to rule and his absolute goodness. The peace of God comes heavily armed. So that when tomorrow I read more bad news about this virus, or my children disappoint me, or some other negative thing happens, God's peace blows away my worry. When I am trusting in God, worry and anxiety will not and cannot be a part of my experience.

"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."
(Isaiah 26:3)

Practical Suggestions

Use the energy that crisis provides to respond biblically

There is an energy to circumstances that concern us, and it takes energy to be anxious. Take that energy and do something spiritually positive with it. There is so much energy right now surrounding this crisis. We can hole up at home and worry ourselves to death. Don't do that. Take that energy and direct it in spiritually positive ways. What can I do to improve the lot of someone else? Think of the calls to neighbors and family and friends. Don't waste this crisis and don't waste the worrying energy it provides.

I will fight the worry with the promises of God

We have all done this. Lay in bed at night. 3:00 in the morning. Can't sleep. All we can do is think about the crisis. In those moments, we have to fight worry by reminding ourselves of what is true. Worry is fantasy. God's promises are true:

Crisis	Worrying Thought	Fighter Promise
Financial	How will I live?	Matthew 6:25ff. – God will supply
Health	What does this mean?	Psalms 139:16 – The days are in his hands
Relationships	Can I live without this person?	Hebrews 13:5 – God is with me
Enemies	What if they win?	Romans 8:31 – With God, I can't lose
Weakness	Can I make it?	2 Corinthians 12:9 – His grace is sufficient

Refuse to give in to fear by meditating on God's goodness

- *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."* (Isaiah 41:10)
- *"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"* (Romans 8:32)
- *"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us..."* (Ephesians 3:20)

You know what this says about God's goodness? It is beyond what I could ask for and beyond what I can imagine. I don't know about you, but I have got some pretty good ideas

for how God could be good to me and I wouldn't mind sharing them with him. Here's the problem. Everything that I could suggest to God, he hears my prayer and says, "You're not thinking big enough, Steve." "But Lord..." and I go on to describe this or that and over each of them God says to the angels, "There goes DeWitt again, he's thinking way too small."

Immeasurably more than I can imagine is how good God promises to be to me. And when I am mediating on that level, the last thing in my mind is anxiety. We're not in that future yet, so for now we must wait, and as we await God's goodness, he provides to us an inner sense of confidence and peace which the world can't give, and the world and this virus, can't take away.

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