

From Fear to Faith

....A message on prayer

Philippians 4:6-7

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“Be anxious for nothing, 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 minds through Christ Jesus.”

The natural state of the heart of fallen man is fear and anxiety. By nature we do not trust God. How then do we move from fear to faith? Philippians 4:6-7 tells us how to do that. What are you worried about? I didn't ask you IF you worry, but what you worry about because we all do it. If I asked all those who worry to raise your hands this morning, no doubt every hand would go up. If I asked how many of you struggle with lying, adulterous, murderous thoughts few if any would raise their hands. Why so? Why would you raise your hands and admit to worry, but not the other sins? Because worry has become an acceptable sin. We are still ashamed of committing those other sins, but worry is not taken seriously as a foul offense against God.

You all know the adage that the first step in overcoming a problem is to admit you have the problem. I would say that the first step in overcoming worry is not only to admit that you are a worrier, but to also admit that this is a serious sin against the Lord. Of course we feel justified in worrying about certain things. All parents worry about their children don't they? Isn't it only natural? While it is right to be concerned about your child, it is wickedness to worry about him or her. Paul says **“Be anxious for nothing.”** That is a universal negative. It includes not worrying about your children, your finances, your relationships, your health, your future, your circumstances, the threat of terrorism, or bodily harm. Take a sheet of paper and write at the top of that sheet – *Top Three Things to Worry About*. For number one write *nothing*. For number two write **nothing**, and for number three write *nothing!*

Now, this time I want you to actually take out a sheet of paper and write down the – *Top Three Things I Tend to Worry About*. Right now, in the middle of the sermon, take a few moments and jot down the 2-3 things you often worry about. I've already written mine down, but I'll give you just a minute to write yours. (my children, the church, finances) Now, scratch through the phrase *Top Three Things I Tend to Worry About* and write *Top Three Things I Can Trust God About*. The rest of this week I encourage you to make these things a matter of serious prayer. And the way you need to pray about these things is not the normal practice of asking God to solve your problems and make everything

better. No, this time, start asking God to teach you how to trust Him for these things! Concentrate on giving them over to God in prayer until you can truly say from the heart that you are trusting God and resting in Him, no matter what the situation is. You and I have got to become serious about getting rid of worry. It has got to go because it is a serious sin.

Paul commands us not to worry about anything! We are not allowed to do it! Jesus said, "**I TELL YOU, DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE**". He also said, "**Do not worry about tomorrow.**" Could Scripture be any clearer about this? What's so wrong then with worry? At first glance it doesn't seem all that bad. Almost everybody does it anyway. And aren't we supposed to be concerned and plan ahead in life? Yes, but we are not permitted to cross over into anxious care and undue concern. One thing that's wrong with worry is that it is foolish. Jesus said, "**WHO OF YOU BY WORRYING CAN ADD A SINGLE HOUR TO HIS LIFE?**" (Matthew 6:27) Worry accomplishes absolutely nothing. It is wasted energy - a useless endeavor. Worrying is futile, pointless, profitless, senseless and irrational.

Worry is not only foolish it is godless. Anxiety is proof that you do not trust God or His word. Oswald Chambers said that anxiety betrays a lack of trust in God's care and is a species of "**unconscious blasphemy.**"¹ Anxious care chokes out God's word, and thereby your faith. In the parable of the sower, Jesus said that some seed fell among thorns. Listen to the explanation that Jesus gives: "**Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.**" (Matthew 13:22) The Greek word for worry or anxiety in this verse means literally to "**DRAW IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS; TO DIVIDE, PART OR TEAR APART.**" This describes the effects of worry - what it does to us. It tears us apart on the inside. It can be the cause of an upset stomach, headaches, ulcers, etc. But the most destructive thing that results from worry is that it keeps you from trusting God and doing the will of God.

What is the cure for worry? Faith. We must move from fear to faith. How is faith expressed? One major way that faith is expressed is through prayer. Verse 6 tells us the answer to anxiety is "**prayer and supplication**". Bengel's commentary states that "**Anxiety and prayer are more opposed to each other than fire and water.**" We are to worry about nothing (universal negative) and we are to pray about everything (universal positive). God expects that there be no worry and instead we ought to

¹ Ralph Martin, *TNTC, Philippians*, p. 171.

be **“praying always.”** If we are praying without ceasing, then there won’t be any room for worry. If after prayer you continue to worry, then you haven’t really prayed! Or you haven’t prayed in faith, or you haven’t persevered in praying. True prayer drives out worry.

Psalm 94:19 says, **“In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.”** The Psalmist was full of anxieties, yet he found comfort and relief. How is it that the Psalmist accessed those comforts? Those comforts are part of the promises of God in Scripture. Without the word of God there is no comfort. But those promises must be believed and they must be pleaded in prayer. Part of the difficulty we have unburdening ourselves in prayer is that we simply ask for things without claiming His promises. The promises are the foundation of assurance, while prayer and faith lay hold of them and make them alive in our lives.

Take for an example, in Psalm 94 just a few verses before the Psalmist declared that God’s comforts delighted his soul, he said, **“For the LORD will not cast off His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance.”** (Ps 94:14) Believing that promise he could pray and have confidence that God would not forsake him because he was one of God’s people that God had promised not to cast off. What is it disturbing you? Are you worrying about your health? Then search the scriptures to find promises that relate to healing and physical well-being. Take those promises to God in prayer. Do the same thing with finances, and family. Plead those verses when making your requests. Your confidence will grow when you have Scripture to bolster your prayers. Of course we must be sure to correctly interpret those verses and not take them out of context.

Paul used three terms in verse six that we need to look at - **“prayer, supplication, and requests.”** The word translated **“prayer”** is a word used of prayer in general. The word translated **“supplication”** emphasizes our sense of need. The word **“requests”** has to do with the content of prayer **“as the formulating of definite and precise requests.”** We ought to get specific in our requests. So many of our prayers could be boiled down to this – **“Lord, bless me and the rest of the world. Amen.”** But why do we need to get specific if God already knows the details? One reason is that it is the details that we are worried about! God does not need to be informed, but we need to cast those particular cares upon the Lord in order to experience His peace about them. General, nonspecific prayers are not answered and neither do they bring any comfort or confidence.

Of course when we make known our requests to God, we must always do so with the acknowledgment of His sovereignty. We are petitioning the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! We

don't go to God and tell him what to do. We make our requests and we let him decide how and when and in what way he will answer. We rest, not in getting all we ask for in prayer, but in the fact that God will give us everything we need. I thank God that he doesn't answer all my prayers with a yes. George Gardner mentioned in the deacons' meeting Thursday night that he was taught that God always answers prayer one of three ways – **“Yes, no, and grow.”** When you ask God for something and your attitude is **“not my will but thine be done”**, that is the height of trust and rest in the Lord. When you pray earnestly and specifically and continually about something to the Lord and yet you wait on the Lord and leave it to him, you will find peace. When you leave all in his care, he will take your cares away.

Paul adds one more qualifier to our prayers – they must be offered with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is thrown right in the middle of all these words that refer to prayer so that we can't get around it. It is not something you tack on at the end or the beginning. Rather, it is something that ought to permeate the way you pray, and the way you ask. And in giving thanks, you must thank God, not only for the solutions, but also for the problems you face. Dr. Adams says that **“If anywhere, it is common for Christians to go wrong by failing to give thanks for the problem. Not that you thank God for the pain or sorrow itself, but for what He is accomplishing through it.”** When you thank God for the problem, you are acknowledging a greater good than simply getting what you ask for. You are acknowledging that through trials God is conforming you to his image and for that you and I can truly give thanks.

I like what British pastor Geoff Thomas has to say about thanksgiving. He says, **“We approach God with thanksgiving. We have problems, yes, but stop a moment! Is that all we have? Are there problems, problems everywhere? Nothing but problems? Have we never had any blessings? Do we have none at all now? Shouldn't you pause for a moment and thank him that you are not at this moment shrieking in the flames of hell in agony knowing that you are in the pit for ever and ever? Shouldn't you thank him for temporal mercies without number, eternal and glorious blessings of redemption and a living hope? Mustn't you, before you tell God your anxieties, pause and tell him how deep is your gratitude to him for what he has done for you?”**

I don't think we can underestimate the importance of thanksgiving. Failure to give thanks is characteristic of those that don't know God. A lack of thanksgiving in your prayers is a sure sign you are very selfish and unloving. The Westminster Confession of Faith says that **“Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men.”** 1

Timothy 2:1 says, “**Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.**” Colossians 4:2 ~ “**Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.**” The Larger Catechism in commenting upon the first and second commandments declares that thanksgiving is part of keeping these commands. The first command is “**You shall have no other gods before Me.**” The Larger Catechism says that part of our duties in fulfilling this command is “**calling upon him; giving him all praise and thanks.**” The second commandment forbids idolatry and all false worship. Part of our duty in keeping this command according to the Larger Catechism is “**the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ.**” The implication is that if you are not praying and giving thanks in your life, you are not worshipping God. Psalm 110:4 declares that we must, “**Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.**”

The wonderful thing is that God has promised to give us peace when we truly and thankfully pray to him. It is God’s peace - the “**peace of God.**” It is the peace he gives by virtue of his lordship. “**Peace in the Old Testament is a kingly blessing following directly upon the acknowledgement of God’s reign and the submission of all his foes.**”² God alone is the source of peace. According to Judges 6:24 he is “**Yahweh Shalom.**” Jesus is called the *Prince of Peace*. In the New Testament we discover that we can only know his peace as we first receive his grace in reconciliation. The peace *of God* is a byproduct of peace *with God* through Jesus Christ. He is our peace, and until you are reconciled to God through him, you will have no peace. That is why confession and repentance must be part of the prayers and petitions that we make. Don’t imagine that you will have peace without repentance and submission to his lordship. Scripture specifically teaches that there can be no peace for the wicked; for those who continue in unrepentant sin (Isa 48:22; 57:21). And do not be fooled by a false peace. The false prophets proclaimed “**peace, peace**” when there was no peace. There are many today who have no fear of hell and have peace, and yet they are only a step away from an eternity of torment. The fact that you are not experiencing peace or that you have a false peace may very well be because you have not received Christ and have not been saved from your sins. Do you want peace? You must receive Christ as your Lord and Savior – and commit your whole life to Him.

The word for peace in the New Testament is based upon the Old Testament word *Shalom*. It is not merely a passive, tranquil state as we typically think. It does include inner tranquility but it also

² Ralph Martin, p. 172.

means —**"to be complete or whole"** or **"to live well."** This peace, Paul says, **"surpasses all understanding."** It surpasses all that you could conceive of or imagine. It defies explanation. The only answer is that it is supernaturally supplied by God's Spirit. The unbeliever knows nothing of this peace and may wonder at it when Christians display it in difficult circumstances. The peace of God you manifest in your life is a significant part of our witness to the world. John Calvin said that this peace causes us **"in the depth of despair to exercise, a feeling of hope, in the depth of poverty to see opulence, and in the depth of weakness to keep from giving way, and, in short, that nothing will be lacking when we are left destitute of all things; and all this in the grace of God alone."** Are you experiencing this kind of peace?

What are we to think about someone who says, **"I prayed but I didn't get peace."** God's promises don't fail; so we know that the problem is in the person praying, not with God or with the Bible. If you don't experience the peace of God, then you need to go back and evaluate your prayers and your repentance. I suggest that you keep praying and praising God until his peace comes. I will mean you have to spend more time in prayer and become more serious and earnest in it. When you truly abandon your soul and every care in your life into the hands of Almighty God, you cannot help but know his peace.

This peace is good because it is a protective shield around our hearts. It is actually part of the armor of God which protects us against Satan and temptation. Paul says this peace of armor will **"guard your hearts and minds."** The word used in this verse is **"A military term picturing God's peace as a detachment of soldiers 'standing guard over' a city so as to protect it from attack."** (Hawthorne) When you have this peace you will be equipped to keep your heart pure. When temptation comes, it will have nothing to offer you because you have what you need from God. We sometimes think that peace in the heart is a luxury, but it is not. If you go out into the world without it, you are much more vulnerable to the allurements of the world and temptations of the flesh. God's peace is both good and necessary!

God's peace will guard your heart and mind Paul says, **"Through Christ Jesus."** Peace comes only by Christ, through Christ, and in Christ. It is not by mere confidence in God, or by mere prayer, but it is by confidence in God as he is revealed through the Redeemer, and by faith in him as our only Mediator. He is our peace. Therefore, don't worry about anything. Pray about everything. Cast all your cares on him, because he cares for you.