

## **How to Overcome Anxiety in Your Life**

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Sermon—May 2-3, 1998

The Facts About Your Feelings Series

Philippians 4:6-7

This morning I am going to continue in my series on emotions that I am calling “The Facts About Your Feelings.” This morning what I want to do is talk with you about how to overcome anxiety in your life. I want to talk about the feeling of worry and anxiety.

The centerpiece of today’s talk is Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything”—Don’t worry about anything.

Now, that is such extraordinary counsel. That is so far beyond what any of us feel capable of doing—that I am going to spend the rest of the talk trying to assist us in making sense of Paul’s statement when he says: “Do not worry, do not be anxious about anything.”

As we approach the millennium, it does appear to me that anxiety about the world and the world’s situation is definitely increasing. I was reading a book called “Miracle Drugs” about the most prescribed medications in America and many of the top selling medications in the United States right now are simply anti-anxiety drugs. Drugs like Xanax, Librium, BuSpar and valium. It does seem that there are a number of pressures that we are dealing with right now that would cause this moment in history to be the age of anxiety. We live extraordinarily fast-paced lives. We don’t sit down and have dinner together. We grab something to eat. We eat as we are going through a drive-thru. The stress of life in the fast lane creates anxiety. Many of us have much less support for basic life functions—raising kids, taking care of babies, taking care of someone when they are sick—than previous generations did who lived in extended family circles.

I have asked this over and over in our church, but how many of you live more than 50 miles from your parents? Or your brothers and sisters? Most people do.

Companies like CompuServe are being bought out; long-term employers like Bank One are moving out of town. The fact that there are so many areas where we can’t feel safe walking around—the sheer magnitude of crime. And then, the continual concerns about children that people at all times and in all places have had to face—concerns about finances; concerns about business; concerns about drugs, violence, teenage sex and the curriculum in schools; relational conflicts; the pressure of trying to find meaning and purpose for our existence; the pressure of family problems; and, the guilt for former sins and mistakes that we have made. All these things stir up in us tremendous anxiety.

And then, we hear the Word of God thundering in the midst of all of these accumulated pressures and causes for upset in our lives. “Do not worry about anything.” How can we do that?

Now, I want you to remember that what we are going to hear is not the counsel of somebody who has just had life go so well for him that he simply doesn't understand real pressure, real stress, real anxiety provoking circumstance—somebody who is basically had everything go well for him for 20 or 30 years. Someone who has had the bill footed for them by “daddy or mommy.” Somebody who has had everything they have touched turn to gold. Just unbroken success.

Well, it is hard to listen to somebody who has just risen above it all and not say, “What do you know about pressure? What do you know about stress? About difficult circumstances and how I would relate in that kind of situation?”

I want to remind you that the two people in the Bible who tell us not to worry certainly do understand pressure and stress in life. The two people in the Bible that tell us not to worry are Jesus and the apostle Paul. Three times in Matthew 6 Jesus says, “Do not worry.” Then he says, “I tell you again, do not worry.” A third time he says, “Do not worry.”

Now, if you know anything about Jesus, you know that he didn't live an easy life. It wasn't as if he had a large bank account, lots of popularity or a secure job. He didn't have an in with the powerful people, or folks who could protect him. If anyone was living in a situation of insecurity it would have been Jesus. Talk about cause for worrying. Nothing was secure in Jesus' life. He didn't have a secure source of food. He didn't have a regular place to live. The government was opposed to him. The religious authorities were opposed to him. He knew from the beginning that he had a traitor among his closest associates.

The words we are going to be hearing are the words of the apostle Paul, who when he wrote this, let's remember, was writing from prison. In chapter 1 he had the stress of relational conflict. People who basically made it their aim to make Paul's life miserable in the church.

In chapter 2, Paul tells us that on top of being in jail and on top of lots of relational conflict and people saying negative things about him, he also was looking at the prospect of dying in the near future. In Philippians 2, Paul tells us about the fact that he is being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith. He is very probably talking about the fact that he believes that he may be given up in martyrdom for his Christian faith.

Yes, you know pressure, Jesus and Paul say, but I know pressure too. And so I have a right to tell you out of my own experience that it is possible to not worry.

Now before we go through Paul's counsel regarding how to stop worrying, I do want to clear the ground and make a couple of distinctions for you. The first thing that I want to say is that I am dealing today with generalized anxiety, with the kind of worry that we all struggle with as we look out at the future and are worried about our finances and our jobs. I am dealing today with the kind of worry that might arise in a woman when she discovers a lump in her breast or in a man when he discovers blood in his stool. I am talking about the worry that many of us undergo regarding one of our children who may be making a number of disastrous choices or be involved in rebellion. Or for a parent who is dying.

What I do not want to do today is deal with more serious and intractable kinds of anxieties that psychologists would classify as panic disorders or severe phobias. If you are regularly suffering from panic attacks. You find the adrenaline rushing into your body for no apparent reason. It's one thing to have an adrenaline rush if you are being chased across a field by an angry bull. It's another thing to have a rush walking into a grocery store or sitting in a business meeting at work. You may start hyperventilating. When you get in certain situations you find yourself trembling, maybe extremely light-headed like you are going to faint, your heart beat starts racing—totally immobilized by being in public or by being around strangers or by being in any closed in place. You may feel like you are losing control or going crazy or going to die. If your problem rises to the level of a panic disorder or a phobia, then you really do need to seek counseling. We have a number of professional counselors here in the Vineyard who can assist you to get to some of the roots of these deep and life controlling problems.

But I do not want to suggest to the true sufferer from some severe kind of anxiety disorder that without assistance, simply apply what I am talking about today and if it doesn't work, well then just continue to suffer. And in very rare instances you may have an unusual bio-chemical disorder that can create the symptoms of anxiety.

Having said that, then what we are dealing with today is the 99% of us who are not suffering from extraordinarily debilitating phobias, regular panic attacks, but who spend a lot of time in fruitless mental activity that the Bible calls worry. I have called today's talk, "How to Overcome Anxiety in Your Life." Because that is what Paul is getting at here in verses 4-9, but first, let's pray.

Archibald Hart, a psychologist, contrasts destructive worry from constructive concern. Let me give you a couple of helpful handles so that you will understand what anxiety is so that you will be able to distinguish it from constructive concern. The word that is used by the apostle Paul is an interesting one. It is a word used to indicate something that divides or separates us or distracts us. So to be anxious or worried is to have a divided mind. It is a mind, which is not functioning as a whole. It is eyes that go in two different directions at the same time and you are not really seeing anything. The characteristic of worry is this constant sense of gnawing distraction. Have you ever tried to talk with someone while they are watching TV? You have this TV blaring in the background and you are trying to carry on a conversation? That is what worry is like. You know you are worrying when you can't focus your mind on the task at hand because there is this background noise. You may be reading or mowing the lawn or making the bed, but instead of focusing on the task, you have a divided mind and there is this background noise of worry. You may be working on a project at your job or trying to get to sleep at night, but your mind is divided.

But it does distinguish for us destructive worry and constructive concern. We must draw a sharp line in our minds to understand what the Bible uniformly condemns, worry, from what the Bible commends and says is an appropriate way to think, which is concern. When Paul talks about not worrying in verse 6, a very

negative kind of thing, he uses the very same word in a positive way back in Philippians 2:20 when he says of Timothy, "I have no one else like him who takes a genuine concern or interest in your welfare." The same word in the Greek is used. So how do you know if it is worry or concern? Concern moves in a straight line, linear direction toward a solution. I have an exam tomorrow; I've got to pass it. I'm going to shut off the TV and pray and then get cracking on the books. I have to find a job. I will pray and then start sending out resumes.

Well, destructive worry always has an element of circular thinking. Where you just always are coming back to the same point and you are not moving forward toward a solution. You are not moving toward constructive activity, but you are just spinning around in your mind in a process that results in mental exhaustion and emotional incapacitation, in self-absorption. You know you are worrying when it feels like a downward spiral, that you are digging around in the same place going further and further down into yourself.

Let me describe this process to you so that you understand the circular thinking that is the characteristic of worry. You are a student and you are facing an exam the next day, which is a crisis event for you. The thinking starts off this way: I have to pass that test tomorrow. Tests are very important. If I don't pass that test tomorrow, I am not going to pass this class. If I don't pass this class, I may be put on academic probation and end up getting thrown out of school. If I get thrown out of school, I don't know what I am going to do with myself. I will probably end up as a failure in life. How will I ever buy a house? How will I ever be able to get married? If I don't stop thinking this way, I won't be able to concentrate enough to be able to study. I have to pass the test tomorrow. And we start it all back up again.

Now, that is destructive worry. That is emotionally exhausting thinking that takes you away from being able to work, from being able to focus. The kind of distracting thoughts that wear you out. It may actually cause you to lose sleep or to have headaches or stomach problems. For many people, this kind of destructive worry creates over-eating or irritability.

I believe that anxiety is all part of Satan's plan to neutralize you as a Christian. Understand that Satan has a plan A and a fallback plan B for you as an individual. Plan A for you is to take you with him to judgment and to hell. That is plan A. Satan's ultimate goal, Plan A for you, is to take you with him to hell. To bring with him, because he knows that he has been judged at the cross, to take with him as many of God's creatures as he possibly can to ruin their lives and to create misery for them eternally along with himself.

Now if Plan A cannot work because God has sovereignly pulled you out of the fire and placed his love in your life and called you his child both now and forever, if Plan A doesn't work because you have become a Christian, then Satan has a fall-back plan, Plan B, and it is to utterly neutralize your impact in the kingdom of God. Plan B for you is to make sure that you get so wrapped up in something, some life controlling habit or all consuming hobby or career or relationship, or destructive worry, but you get so wrapped up in yourself that you have no emotional or spiritual energy to have a larger impact for the kingdom of

God. Satan is always going around trying to neutralize those who are trying to move forward in Christ.

Let's find something that can cancel out your effect completely. And so, for you, if you are a Christian, Satan is continually operating with Plan B. God wants you to have a large impact for the kingdom. He wants it to be like throwing a big boulder in the water. Your life will have a big splash. Satan is continually attempting to cut away the impact of your life and to freeze you. One of the main ways he does that is by destructive worry.

How do we overcome destructive worry?

I want you to hear what Paul is saying and what he is not saying. Typically, when we are faced with pressure or crisis, we fall back on a number of self-help kinds of responses. We might fall back on trying to tough it out saying, "Well, I am facing a crisis and so I am just going to rally some internal stuff to deal with it. I will face it like a Marine," or I will just despair and say, "This always happens to me. There is no blessing for me in my life. Why is life so terrible toward me? Why is God so much against me?" If I can't be a Marine, I might despair and sink into self-pity and begin to accuse myself of being a failure and of being stupid. Or, I could try the super spiritual approach and minimize the crisis. "Well, it is not so bad that I am out of work and I just won't think about it. I will put it out of my mind. Now, I am happy all the day."

Paul says: I don't want you to take any of those human approaches to dealing with worry because the ultimate cure for worry is found in the Lord. In other words, put down all of your props, all of your psychological strategies, all of your human devices. In dealing with crisis, if you want to stop worrying, you must find your answer in a deep trusting relationship with the Lord.

You see, Paul is giving counsel to Christians here. What Paul is going to tell us in terms of overcoming worry makes no sense if you are not connected to God. This is not the kind of thing that can be applied by anyone—just sound mental health principles. Paul is not giving us psychological advice, he's giving spiritual advice. It's not: here is how to crowd worry out of your mind, or fill your mind with this or that; here is the way to stop worrying; four steps to stop worrying that can be applied by anyone.

The counsel that Paul is giving in this context can only be done by citizens of heaven. Somebody who is growing in their relationship with God. There is no ultimate cure for destructive worry apart from the Lord. Paul is offering spiritual counsel.

Now, what am I talking about by laying down your props and all of your psychological devices and all of your self-help ways of coping with crises? Hop over with me to 2 Corinthians 4. I want to show you something about the way the apostle Paul dealt with pressure.

Paul tells us throughout 2 Corinthians that he was just facing extraordinary pressure. At this point in his life, Paul said that: I have so much pressure on me that I despaired of even continuing to live. I just thought that I could not go on in this life, that physically my body was just about to collapse. He might have been facing a death sentence. He certainly was exhausted of all resource. And in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul says: Let me tell you what props I have laid down. In verse

1 he says: Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather we have renounced secret and shameful ways. We do not use deception.

He says in verses 1 and 2 that despite all of the pressure that I am facing, I have given up scheming. There is a human prop. When we are facing crisis, we try to shade the truth. We scheme. We deceive. I don't have enough money to pay my taxes. Maybe I will lie a bit on my taxes. I am cornered. Maybe I will lie on my resume.

Paul says: What keeps me going and what keeps me from worrying is not my ability to scheme and lie my way out of something.

In verse 8 he says: We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed.

He pictures himself as being pressured and squeezed from all sides. Hard pressed from all sides, he says, what keeps me going, what keeps me from imploding, simply collapsing is certainly not my strength. The reason why I just don't collapse under all this pressure and don't get crushed is not my strength.

Then he goes on and he says: I am perplexed, but not in despair. What keeps me able to go in the midst of crisis is not that I understand what is happening to me, because I don't. You know, a lot of people say that you need to at least be able to understand why you are going through this surgery or why you lost your job or why your child has ended up in rebellion. There is this human search for understanding. We feel like if we only understood what God was up to, then we could stop worrying.

Paul says: What keeps me going and not worrying is not my smarts. Because I am perplexed. I don't know why I am going through this. I am perplexed but I am not in despair. The fact that I don't understand doesn't cause me to sink into depression. He says: I am persecuted, but not abandoned. I am not kept going, either, by the fact of my great social skills and my ability to make everyone happy all the time. There are a group of people who simply will always hate you. Paul says: I am persecuted, but I am not abandoned. There is somebody who stays with me, who loves me, namely God.

And, finally, he says: I am struck down, but not destroyed. It is not my situation either and the fact that I can see my situation getting better that keeps me going. I am struck down, but I am not destroyed.

We need to understand several things here about worry. Circumstances do not create worry. It is not the pressure from outside that brings worry, but the care of the heart inside. I think of Jesus' words in Mark 7:15 where he says, "Nothing outside of man can make him unclean by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean." I think that is a wonderful scripture regarding worry and anxiety. See, we are always saying, "It's the circumstance, it's the situation, it's this thing outside of me that is creating the anxiety." But Jesus would say that was absolutely false. Anxiety is not a product of the pressure outside, but something that is wrong inside of you.

In the same way that you can't say, "Well, the reason why I fell into adultery is because of this seduction out there or this dissatisfaction in my marriage, or the coldness of my husband or wife." All of those things were simply door openers. They simply provided the opportunity for you, but it was because

of what was in your heart that you committed adultery. Pressure merely provides us with an opportunity to express what is in our hearts. And so if what is in your heart is worry and anxiety, the pressure just gives you the opportunity to express that.

Let me spin it in the opposite direction so that you will understand what I am saying. There is a story in the gospels about Jesus riding in a boat on the Sea of Galilee with his disciples. Suddenly a storm comes up. The waves are really high and are crashing over the boat. They are threatening to swamp it. And what is Jesus doing? Sleeping like a baby on a cushion in the stern of the boat. Carefree, asleep. The disciples are freaking out. Jesus is taking a catnap.

See, we always labor under the misconception that if the seas were calm, if we just experience smooth sailing with my health, my kids, or in my marriage, or in my relationships, if it was just smoother I wouldn't be worried. Jesus models for us peace, a carefree attitude, a simple trust in the Father, when the seas are raging. When the storm is up. When the waves are coming into the boat. Paul says, "It is not my situation that enables me to be free from worry."

Now, listen to this litany of human devices that Paul says: These are all the things that I have discovered don't work. It is not my schemes that keep me going. It is not my strength that keeps me going. It is not my smarts that keep me going. It is not my social skills that keep me going. And it is not the fact that my situation is improving. I have completely given up on all human devices to keep me from worrying.

Unlike Stuart Smalley, I don't keep myself from worrying by making daily affirmations. I'm good enough. I'm smart enough. And doggone it, people like me. Paul says: As a Christian I realize I am not good enough. I am not smart enough. And doggone it, there are lots of people who don't like me.

See, I think that one of the secrets of overcoming worry was described by Bob Dylan when he said: "It ain't me, babe. No, no, no. It ain't me, babe."

I can't do it. All the scaffolding that I have built, all the props, all the attempts to be strong, or to be smart, or to be socially skillful, or to scheme, ultimately all of that stuff is so vulnerable, it is always shaken.

So, what is the secret? Well, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4 and he tells us in Philippians 4. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4: I realize that I have this treasure inside, although I am an earthen vessel. I am carrying around inside of me the life of Christ, although my body is wearing away.

But, ultimately, those are psychological answers or human answers and will not enable you to fulfill Philippians 4:6, which says: Don't worry about anything. The only way that you cannot worry about anything, no matter what life throws you, is to first of all determine that you need to deepen your relationship with the Holy Spirit.

I will just say a couple of things here and we will move on. You know, you are not going to have inner strength that keeps you from inner collapse if you are grieving the Holy Spirit right now. Is there something in your life that is causing the Holy Spirit to withdraw from you? If you are involved in some activity, which is causing the Holy Spirit to pull away, to be saddened, to withdraw blessing—we are talking about relationship with a person here, the person of God through the

Holy Spirit. And you can't have the resource to deal with worry while you continue to offend God.

One person said that worry is paying interest on a debt that may never come due. We pay interest now on a debt that may never come due. Now, I want to again remind you that also the biblical approach to worry is not simply psychological or pragmatic.

The apostle Paul doesn't say: Don't worry, what you are so afraid of happening will probably never happen. You know, what are the chances that you have cancer? Because again our human reasoning is not the solution to worry. It is not sufficient enough to say: Well, what you are afraid of may never happen, because of course a worrier would say that it may happen. Paul is not just reasoning out of probability. Well, what are the chances that the plane will crash? Well, even if they are very small, if I am on the one that crashes, I am going to die.

What are the probabilities that you will stay out of work for two years? Well, there is some possibility that I will be out of work for two years. The cure for worry is not probability. It is not psychology. It is not math; the answer is spiritual. Paul says that the antidote for worry is prayer and thanksgiving. In verse 6: Do not be anxious about anything. But in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God.

In other words, don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. Pray about everything. And here we fall down because we say to ourselves: This is so little. I don't really need to pray about it. I will just handle it with my own strength and my own smarts. Paul says: Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. Even the little things.

The fact is we can come to the Father about everything. Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer about our daily bread, the little mundane things, our rations. The little portion that we need today. Even in the miracles of Jesus you see that Jesus meets not only huge needs like the raising of Lazarus from the dead, but also little needs. For example, his first miracle was not the salvation of people. His first miracle was saving a couple on their wedding day from embarrassment. He turned water into wine so that the couple on their wedding day wouldn't suffer from any social stigma of running out of wine for their guests. Big deal. Just a little embarrassment – but that's how carefully he watches and attends to our little cares. It is why Peter tells us in 1 Pt. 5:7, "Cast all your anxiety, cast every one of your cares upon him because he cares for you." The little concerns with one of your kids. The little tests. The little conflicts. Your car problems. Your credit card debt. Soak everything you do and touch in prayer. And the massive things that are particularly bothering you, you pray about those as well.

Just as an aside, Psychology Today recently did a little report on the effect of prayer on your brain, and specifically on your brain activity when you worry. This is pretty interesting – they actually did brain scans and hooked up EEG monitors during prayer. They discovered that there were beneficial changes that occurred in the brain, the kind of changes that have been proven to be correlated to health and longevity, occurring simply by praying.



Now, I certainly don't believe that prayer is just a pleasant form of meditation. I believe we are communing with a person. But it is interesting that the very activity of communing with a person also results in benefits and health for us in terms of our physical health. Prayer not only has a spiritual benefit, an emotional benefit, it even has a physical benefit for you.

Now, many, many Christians will say at this point: But I have prayed about this crisis and I still haven't found any relief. I am still worried. I know that the antidote for worry is supposed to be prayer, but I just haven't found that this is working for me. I am still stressed out about our finances. I am still stressed out about the exam. I am still stressed out about my health. I am still stressed out about my kids.

Frankly, friends, I believe that a lot of Christians walk around saying to themselves: This Christianity thing that I am involved in, I know that it is true, but for me it just doesn't seem to work. Have you ever felt that way? I have followed the advice. I have prayed about this and I still haven't overcome the worry.

Well, may I share with you a few thoughts regarding this because I believe Christianity rightly understood and applied works. And if it is not working, it is because honestly we haven't understood what is promised to us or we have misapplied it. We have tried to make a promise out of what is not a promise. There is some loss of truth in us. Christianity, real Christianity, works.

So what is the problem regarding praying about something and being free from worry?

I believe that much of our prayer really is prescribing the means to God by which he should supply us with what we feel we need. See, instead of releasing a matter entirely to the Lord, where we say, "God you are the giver of my life and I am going to hand back my life or a smaller part of my life—my work, my child, my school, my loneliness – I am going to hand it back to you asking you for your assistance," we prescribe the means in which God must help us. We say to God, "God, I am having financial problems and let me tell you how you can meet those financial problems. I need to have money at such and such a time from such and such a source and in such and such a quantity." We tell God, "Not only here is my need, but God here is the way and the means and the specific way that things should work out." It is like saying to God, "I want you in my house and here is the door you need to enter through. You need to come in through the front door." And I am going to be standing at the front door with the light on and my prayer list is directed toward waiting for God to come in through the front door. That God should decide to surprise me and come in through the side door, or that God should surprise me and come in through the back door or window or chimney – well, God couldn't possibly meet me if he doesn't follow my formula. And often times I don't get any comfort because I am so focused on God coming through the front door.

Is it not the case, friends, that we often not only tell God our need, but then prescribe to him the one way in which he will meet our need by giving us this relationship and no other? By giving us this job and no other? Here is the way, God, you are going to provide for me. And the result is that we so cling to the means and our own program and our own prescription that we find no real

relief in prayer, no real joy in prayer. We get up from prayer as exhausted and distressed as when we went in. Prayers in which we tell God exactly what God must do, and the manner that he needs to do it in, certainly don't make us fresh. They don't refuel us.

The kind of prayer that the apostle Paul is talking about is prayer in which we commit things to the hands of God. It is not wrong to ask God to give us a certain job or to give us a certain relationship. But who knows if that job or relationship is really what God has prescribed for our lives? Who knows if that is the way that we will ultimately be able to build the Kingdom? Who knows if having that job or relationship or home will render us most serviceable to God?

I remember distinctly being out of work and having my first child on the way and having just purchased our first home, suffering from a rapidly depleting bank account and crying out to God for a certain job which I just knew would be the way that he would provide for Marlene and me and our family financially. When that job didn't come through I was devastated and wondered if God even cared, if he heard my prayers.

Lots of times when we say we are praying, what we really mean is that we are prescribing. And friends, every one of our prescriptions to God must be held with a very loose hand. Prayer is the release of a request, a release of a need to God, trusting that God really does know what is best. It is enough for us to know that God will take care of all the ways that lead to the goal of us being conformed to Christ's image. It is enough for us to know that God is interested in the very little things in our life. But if God chooses to come in through the side door or the back door or walk through the wall, then we Christians say, "Thy will be done, Almighty God."

If you are going to apply the antidote of prayer, make sure you not prescribing things to God, but are instead releasing cares to God. And perhaps the searching test of whether you are talking to God is whether in your prayers, you are able to add thanksgiving. Paul says: Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything through prayer and petition with much thanksgiving make your requests known to God.

Now if there ever was a spiritual solution to worry that will not be found in any self-help book, it is this whole business of whether you are offering thanksgiving to God in the midst of your crisis. Let me tell you what Paul is not saying. Contrary to many popular teachings, I don't believe Paul is saying here: When you pray, make sure you thank God in advance regarding what you prayed about. In other words, if you have prayed for a job and you are really trusting God for it, then immediately thank God in advance for his answer, saying, "Thank you, God. I know that all of this is going to turn out." Paul is not urging a super spirituality that we claim we have the thing right then and say "thank you" for it.

See, I believe that thanksgiving is like a shovel that begins to dig up in the human heart the doubt that worriers are holding against God secretly, but don't even know it. Do you know that if you are a worrier, and you are worrying right now in crisis, that below the surface of your nice Christianity, you are probably filled with doubt about God's fatherly care. That there is a deeply rooted rock of

fear in your spirit that clogs your relationship with God and this rock is the thought that God may not be running the planet.

Let me put it this way. Do you know that the devil has a perspective of life that he wants to teach you just as God has a perspective of life that he wants to teach you. And worry is often the product of looking at life from the vantage point of the devil. See, the devil is the ultimate nihilist. He says, "Look out at the world. There really is no meaning, no thread of purpose. All these crooks and drug dealers are getting away with murder. People who are good are left holding the bag." You read in the paper one disaster after another. One earthquake after another. That is what the devil did with Job. He assaulted his mind trying to persuade Job that life is nothing but a jumbled confusion of accident and chance. There is no Father in heaven watching over us. Job, don't expect justice. Don't expect meaning. Don't expect that good will be rewarded and wickedness will be punished. Don't think that there is any thread of concern shown in the world at all. The house blows down and it is by blind chance, blind fate. That is what the world looks like from the devil's perspective. It is just a game of Russian roulette. You don't know when the bullet is going to be in the chamber. There is no fatherly care or control. No wonder we can't rest at night. We always have to be alert and on our guard.

And very often the devil will bury a secret hidden fear deep within our souls. A fear that is sometimes revealed only by the Holy Spirit. But people carry around for years a fear that some terrible thing is going to befall one of their children. Or their husband is going to leave them or be unfaithful. Or their spouse is going to die. Or they are never going to get married.

I tell you, brothers and sisters, the reason many of us don't find relief in prayer is because deep down inside we believe that God may not be running the world or is unconcerned about my life. Now this grudge we hold against God forms a wall in our relationship with him so that we never have that break through of contact where we say, yes, God has heard me. I am in touch with God. I now feel that there is a flow of life with God. I have really been able to deliver this concern to God. How can we break that wall down between God and us? Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving.

You say: Here I am out of work. What should I say? Thank you, God, that I lost my job? Thank you, God, that I have been fired? Thank you, God, for this cancer? Thank you, God, that my son is sick? Thank you that I'm single when I want to be married? Or that we are running out of money?

No, don't start with the problem. Don't prescribe the only possible solution to God. Don't tell God what door to enter. In thanksgiving, start off as simple as you can. Thank you, God that you sent your son Jesus into the world to die for my sins. God, thank you that at least in eternity I am going to be able to live with you. Begin to say thank you to God for the scope of your salvation. Think about the cross and thank Jesus for bearing your sins on the cross and for being willing to endure suffering and pain for you. Thank Jesus for being willing to have nails driven through his hands for you. Thank him for the love and the forgiveness that he spoke from the cross when he said: Father, forgive them.

Then go on and start thanking God for different blessings that do exist in your life. Maybe it would be the blessing of your marriage. Or the blessing of kids or the blessing of being able to go to school or the blessing of a friend. Thank you, God, for this church. Maybe it is the fact that your body is working this well or that you do have food currently.

I tell you, as you begin to say thank you and you start counting your blessings and one by one you say thank you for each blessing and you are allowing that flood of thanksgiving to flow from your spirit, what is going to happen is that more and more the walls are going to come down between you and God and you are going to find that you are looking at life not from the devil's perspective, but from God's perspective. And life looked at from God's perspective looks a whole lot different. Because from God's perspective, you start seeing evidence after evidence of God's fatherly care. Dozens and dozens of occasions where God has been good to you, where he has shown you that he is a provider, that he is trustworthy and can be relied upon. Maybe he didn't come in the front door, as you hoped, but the fact is, he came. He met you in some other way. Sometimes God coming through the side door was so much better than the prescribed way that you had for him. Sometimes his greatest kindnesses were revealed to you by saying "no" to something you were demanding. When you give thanks to God, pretty soon he will wedge out of your spirit that doubt of His control and fatherly care and you will say, "Where did I ever get the idea that God didn't care?" Pretty soon you will be in touch with God. The wall between you and him will be broken down. It is not my schemes or my smarts. It is not my social skills or my situation. It ain't me, babe. It is the person of God that makes a difference.

The incredible thing that occurs, the wonderful promise is that once this wall is broken down between you and God—look at the promise in verse 6: Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God. Okay, now I am in touch with the person of God. I am not just talking to the bombs. I am feeling close to God. What is the promise?

The promise is: And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (verse 7). Here is the incredible promise. It is not that all the things that you are worrying about will suddenly disappear. We don't hear the promise of scripture regarding worrying. We don't even have a clue as to what is promised us. We think that the promise is that God hears your request and will immediately grant it. God is just going to take the struggle away, right away. No more illness. No more job hassle. The next job, you are going to be accepted. No more problems with your kids. You are going to get 100% on the exam.

Paul says nothing about whether we get the object of our requests or not. What he says is that once you get in touch with God, the promise is that the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ. God will relate to you and give you so much peace that whatever your circumstance, whether the struggle continues or not, you are going to know that it will be okay.

Now, brothers and sisters, I just want to break this down for you and show you how extraordinarily wonderful this promise is. The apostle Paul says that once you start touching God, God is going to give you peace that passes all understanding. Listen, that peace that passes all understanding is a peace, a calmness, that can't be accounted for by any kind of human equation, any kind of human reasoning. And that is why Paul doesn't say: And oh by the way, the circumstances are immediately going to change. See, if the circumstances immediately changed, we are not talking about peace that passes understanding, we are talking about every understandable peace.

If Paul said: Well, and oh by the way, God is going to deposit \$75,000 in your bank account and pay for all your debt, then anyone who was looking at us would say: It is perfectly understandable to me why Rich is at peace. He has \$75,000 in his bank account. I would be at peace too if I had \$75,000 in my bank account. It is perfectly understandable why Mary is at peace. The test came back and it was negative. She is perfectly healthy.

Understand that Paul is talking to Christians and he is saying to Christians, "Christian, what is there in your life that marks you out as different from everyone else on earth?" Is it that your car doesn't break down and theirs does? No. Is it that God just blesses you and doesn't bless anyone else? No. The Bible says it rains on the just and the unjust alike. Rain in the Bible is always blessing, except at the time of the flood. God blesses pagans. God gifts people with incredible musical abilities that hate him.

So what is it, Christian, that makes you different? That gives witness to the reality of a God who can do anything? What makes you different is the fact that you, uniquely, can have peace all the time and never have to worry no matter what your circumstance. No one else on earth can have peace. All the human props, human psychology always give way. They are always vulnerable to some pressure. But the peace of God, it can't be accounted for humanly. You get in touch with God, you have that breakthrough where you start touching God and relating to God and giving to God all your grudges against him and pretty soon you don't get tyrannized by anything.

How many of you have known the peace of God? In the midst of a crisis you felt this treasure in your earthen vessel and the peace of God was so strong that you said to yourself: You know, I almost feel bad that I am not feeling bad. I mean things are going terribly, and outwardly I don't really have a whole lot of reason to be confident or be joyful. To have this calm. I am facing surgery or I am facing this particular pressure, but I don't know, I just don't feel worried about it. I just feel like God is in control and God is going to provide. That is the peace of God that passes understanding that you can have. That is your possession. Christian, never let that be taken from you.

Let's pray.