

Don't Worry, Give Thanks!

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[0 : 00] So, good morning. My name is Michael McKittrick, and it's a special joy to be with you this morning. And I'm glad I got here safely. I drove from Madison this morning. Obviously, there was a lot of snow.

Thankfully, the roads weren't too bad. I did probably see about 20 cars either in the ditch or in accidents from here to Madison. So, I was praying for those people. Thankful I was not one of them. So, it is good to be here with you because I've known Mike Salvati since back in 2008 when I moved from Canada to the U.S. to go to Trinity. Ended up at Crossway Community Church over in Bristol, and I ended up volunteering in the youth group ministry under Mike Salvati.

He was a mentor to me. He did premarital counseling for my wife and I. And as we joked earlier, he's not responsible for anything after the premarital counseling. But I married to my wife, Heather. We have three daughters, 13, 11, and 9, that are back home in Madison.

And we've been in Madison since 2016 with a heart to make disciples there. We're currently involved in a missional house church community, so reaching people unreached by traditional church.

[1 : 11] And then I also am involved with a ministry called Word Training that partners with churches to equip believers in how to study, do, and teach God's Word. And so, I love God's Word, love studying it with God's people, so it's a real joy to be here with you this morning.

If you want to open up your Bibles to the book of Philippians, chapter 4, we're going to look at just two verses this morning, verses 6 and 7. They're well-known verses, but I think they can speak to us afresh this morning.

Here we are on the Sunday after Thanksgiving, and hopefully you had a chance to reflect, to give thanks, because no matter what's going on in our lives, there's always something that we can be thankful for.

We heard Pastor Mike pray for many of those things, right? There's always something we can give thanks for. And at the same time, in a world that is broken by sin, there's often also something that can burden us, isn't there?

That we can have these burdens and these cares that weigh on us, and I'm sure that many of you this morning are bringing some of those things in. That there are challenges facing you, that there are things that worry you and keep you up at night that aren't easy to handle.

[2 : 27] And thankfully, God's Word doesn't just leave us in this place, but we're going to see this morning that God wants to meet us in the midst of our anxieties, in the midst of our concerns, and point us to a way of working through those things.

And so, as we read Philippians 4, 6 through 7, I just want to remind us of the context here, because sometimes we can read these words and think, well, that I could only be written by someone that's in a really good spot.

But Paul is writing these words from prison. He has a lot of things he could be worried about. Paul is writing to the church in the city of Philippi that is facing persecution.

They have a lot of things they could be worried about. And yet Paul writes these words, Philippians 4, verses 6 through 7, 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. This is God's Word.

[3 : 40] So, we're going to see here this morning that Paul gives two commands with one result. And the first command he gives is, do not be anxious about anything.

Now, the first thing that stands out to me when I see that is just how all-encompassing Paul is putting this, right? He says, do not be anxious about anything. Paul doesn't give any exceptions. He says, I don't want you to be worried about anything. And maybe at first glance that strikes us as, man, Paul must be naive. I mean, that's impossible, this command.

But here it is. What do we do with this? Well, I think it's helpful to consider what does Paul mean by do not be anxious. And I think it's really helpful here to distinguish between fear and anxiety.

Fear is a natural response of our bodies and our brains to imminent danger, right? So, the other week when I was climbing up my ladder to clean out my gutters of leaves, we have like four big maple trees in our backyard, so they dump down a ton of leaves.

[4 : 45] I feel fear because I'm like six feet up, and if I fall, I could get seriously hurt, right? So, I feel fear, right? In this moment, there's a real danger, and that fear is a God-given response to be careful.

There's danger I need to act appropriately. Anxiety is if I would have sat around for the three hours leading up to getting on the ladder and worried about what would have happened when I got on the ladder, right?

Anxiety has to do with seeing the future and worrying about potential danger in the future that may or may not even come to pass, right? So, there's a difference between fear, a very natural, healthy response, and anxiety.

Anxiety. And anxiety really is about we're looking into the future, which we don't know, and only God knows, and we're trying to figure out how to control that unknown future, which only God can do, right?

And I get it. I think it's a very normal human thing. I'm anxious sometimes, right? We want to see what's coming and get our hands around it and control it so that everything turns out right. Because, let's face it, we live in a world where things don't always turn out right.

[5 : 56] And maybe we've had bad experiences in the past, so we want to somehow protect our future. And so, we look ahead and try to control it with our anxiety. Except we can't know the future.

Only God can. And we can't control it. And so, anxiety in some sense is us trying to reach into the future and say, thanks God, I'd like to take this out of your hands and put it into my hands.

Okay? Because I want to be in control. And that's why I think Paul is saying, do not be anxious.

Because he's saying, when we're being anxious like that, we're trying to take something out of God's hands and put it into our hands that we can't control anyways.

And again, that's different from fear. And so, he doesn't want us to be anxious. He wants us, instead, to have a posture of trusting God with the future. Now, the thing is, I just want to be honest, these verses can sometimes be used as a bludgeon.

Right? Maybe that's happened to you before. Where you're feeling anxious about something and someone comes along and says, well, just don't be anxious. Just, you know, don't worry. Be happy. And that doesn't work, does it?

[7 : 03] And it makes me think of this Bob Newhart skit where he's this counselor. And he only charges five bucks a counseling session. So, people come to him and they're really excited about it. Except his only piece of advice is, well, just stop it.

You know, people come to him and they're like, I'm really worried about this. He's like, well, just stop it. I mean, you don't want to be worried, right? Just stop it. And of course, that's not helpful. Right? Just saying stop it doesn't work.

When our minds are racing and anxiety is crowding, just trying to stop our brains doesn't work. And then when people come along maybe and just try to minimize our fear, that doesn't really work either, does it?

Or if we try to minimize it. Or maybe you just try to, like, power through that anxiety or just distract yourself. But none of those things work to deal with our anxiety, do they?

Anxiety just keeps racing in our minds. And we're going to see how Paul addresses it. But before we do, I just want to mention that there is sometimes just physical things going on with anxiety.

[8 : 13] I don't know about you, but if I get a lack of sleep for a prolonged period of time, my mind doesn't function as well. Right? It's easier to be depressed or anxious. Right?

Good sleep helps. Exercise. How we eat. And also, too, sometimes, just like some other parts of our body don't work well and need some help, maybe our brain needs a little bit of help, a little bit of medicine to help it function better.

And that's something I can just share from my own experience, that I, myself, am on a low dose of something that helps my brain slow down so I can take thoughts captive and process them in a way that honors God.

And I just share that because sometimes I think we can rush too quickly to the spiritual and miss that because we're a physical, spiritual being, there can be both physical and spiritual things going on with our anxiety.

We don't want to miss either one. So, if we're not going to be anxious, what can we do instead?

Well, this leads us to our second command where Paul says to let your request be made known to God with thanksgiving.

[9 : 17] Paul says the way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything. The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything.

And in doing this, what we see is really there's just one command. He's not adding another burden to you. He's giving you a way out. He's saying, if you're feeling anxious, here's the good news.

God doesn't just leave you there. God cares so much about you that he invites you to bring that to him. And he's not going to slap you down and say, how could you be anxious about that?

No, he's going to meet you with that anxiety. 1 Peter 5 tells us to cast all our cares upon God because he cares for us.

Prayer is saying, I'm going to come to God. I'm going to put the future back into God's hands because I admit that I can't control it anyways. And I'm going to choose to believe as I pray that God's hands are better than mine.

[10 : 27] And again, this doesn't mean that things are always going to turn out the way we want. But what it means is we trust God more than we trust our own ability to control the future.

And we say, I'm going to look to you, God. I'm going to put the future back into your hands because I believe, one, that you care. And I believe, two, that you are powerful enough to be at work.

Whatever that looks like. Bringing our requests to God, and notice how he just repeats this over and over again, right? He says, but in everything by prayer and supplication, which is another synonym for prayer.

With thanksgiving, let your request, your request is another synonym for prayer. He keeps saying, pray, pray, pray. He's saying, we're praying and making these things known to God, not because God doesn't know them, right? Like, God's not like, oh, I'm so glad you told me about that.

I totally missed that. You know, I got so busy, you know, making sure that the Buckeyes could win, right? I'm kidding. I'm not a Buckeyes fan. But God is not so busy with things that he suddenly forgot our needs.

[11 : 31] He wants us to bring a request to him, not because he's the government and he has to fill out a form so he can do something about it, but because he's a listening friend. And he wants you to experience bringing your need to him and realizing that he'll sit there with you and say, I care.

I care. I'm with you in this. I won't leave you. I won't forsake you. No matter what comes, I'll be with you in it. He wants us to experience that in prayer.

He wants us to experience this prayer as us entering into a relationship with God and saying, God, I'm here. I'm needy. Maybe we come and we're really feeling the mess of life. He's okay with that. God, just read the Psalms.

Right? How often they're just dumping their emotions on God and God is like, that's okay. I'm going to meet you in the midst of you dumping your emotions on me. I want to listen because as I listen and you experience me being with you, you experience his care.

And not only do we experience his care, but he tells us to not just come with requests, but to come with thanksgiving. We come with thanksgiving because there's always something we can give thanks for.

[12 : 50] We come with thanksgiving because when we come with thanksgiving, we start to see actually God at work. Because when we're in the midst of the hard, it's really easy to lose sight of what God's doing, right?

But then as we pray and bring thanksgiving to God, we can see where he is at work. And so you're praying for a family member who's walked away from the Lord, but you're giving thanks, saying, God, thanks so much that they still come to all our family gatherings.

God, thanks so much that I have an open line of communication with them. God, thank you so much that I know that they have a Christian coworker. And all of a sudden we start to realize, oh, it's

not hopeless.

Maybe God's at work. And we don't just pray for what God's doing in the moment, but we can always pray for thanksgiving for what God's done in the past. To recall to mind what he's done, right?

We can thank God for different ways he's been at work in our own lives. But then also we can give thanks ultimately for what God has done in Jesus. We can always go back to the cross and say, God, whatever else is going on, I'm so thankful that you, Jesus, did what I couldn't do, live the perfect life.

[14:08] To die the death I deserve. To offer me the hope that I could never earn on my own eternal life with you. There's always something we can give thanks for.

And if we're recalling that to mind as we're praying to God, all of a sudden it's like we get another kind of lens of what we see going on around us.

We bring our real cares. We don't minimize them. We don't downplay them. We bring them to God. We experience him with us in prayer. And we give thanks to him for what he's done and what he's doing.

And we see that God's doing more than what the anxiety tells us is going on, right? And we see something and we start to be transformed a bit.

So maybe you're in a situation where you're wrestling with money worries. This can happen to all of us, right? At points. And you're sitting there and you're asking God to provide for you.

[15:02] But then you start to pray and you give thanks. And you think about, like for me this happened a little while ago and I was praying and just thanking God. That God, thank you so much that even if the worst happened, I have a church family that will give me a couch to sleep on.

That's the, if I lost everything, I know I wouldn't be homeless because of a church family I have. That's a really sweet thing to give thanks for. And all of a sudden again, it's like my heart starts to see, oh, God's at work.

God's going to be with me in this. And it's not that that care's not still there, but now that care, as I pray with thanksgiving, turns from worry to a trust with God.

And so what does that lead in terms of a result? Well, we see that in verse 7. Notice that Paul does not say anything about our circumstances changing.

Paul doesn't say, if you pray, everything will turn out great on earth. He doesn't say, if you pray, God will fix it just the way you want. What he says is, the peace of God will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

[16:24] What he says is, what really is going to change as you pray in the mix of anxiety is your heart and mind will change. Your circumstances might not, but your heart and mind will change.

And he says particularly that the peace of God will guard you. Well, what is this peace of God that will guard us? I don't know about you, but I think I used to read this thinking, well, it's just this feeling that will somehow come upon me.

And I think sometimes God does give us just these feelings of peace, right? Just supernatural peace. I believe he does that. I've experienced that. Maybe you have too. But I don't think that's what Paul is primarily talking about here.

Because a feeling that can come or go is not a very good guard for your heart or mind, is it? A feeling that can come or go is not who you want to pay to do security of your heart and mind from anxiety, right?

We need a different kind of peace. And if you think about it, every time peace and God are connected in the New Testament, right? You can see it at the beginning of every one of Paul's letters. He says, grace to you and peace from God.

[17:28] Every single letter he begins it that way. Grace to you and peace from God. And most of the time he connects it and Jesus Christ, right? He's saying peace is not this feeling. Peace is something we receive from God.

And it's something we have with God. So God is both the one giving it and the one we have peace with. So for example, in Romans chapter 5, verse 1, we read this. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we've been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Or Ephesians 2 puts it this way. It says, But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for he himself is our peace, who has made us both one

and broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

Jesus did this to reconcile us to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. See, before Jesus, our relationship with God was hostility.

And not because God's not loving, but because we aren't very loving. And we put ourself as his enemy. And yet through Jesus, God has made peace with us.

[18 : 45] And that peace we have with God that comes from God through Jesus, that's what will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Jesus. That's what will guard you because it's an objective reality.

And I think about it this way. There was this, I'm a hockey fan being from Canada, and there's a goaltender by the name of Roberto Luongo. He played for the Vancouver Canucks back in the day. And he was a great goalie in the regular season, but could never win when it came to the playoffs. All right? And so he had this kind of reputation, you can't win when it matters. But he was the goalie for Canada's Olympic team in 2010 and won gold.

And immediately in the interview afterwards, someone asked him, how does it feel? And he said, well, from now on, no matter what someone says about me, I have this gold medal to prove that I am a winner.

He wasn't relying on a feeling. He had an objective gold medal that he had objectively won to point to. And Paul is saying, that's what the peace we have with God through Jesus is.

[19 : 48] It's an objective reality that can guard us. And that's why he says, it surpasses all your understanding. I mean, you cannot begin to plumb the depths of the beauty of the gospel, friends.

I mean, who would have imagined that God the Son, fully equal with God the Father, would empty himself and take the form of a servant for you, for me.

And not only that, but he was obedient to the point of death on a cross. For you, for me. Who would make that up? That's amazing.

That's how much God loves you? Yeah. That's how much God loves you. And that peace we have with him, that's what's going to guard your hearts.

Because what happens is when anxiety comes calling, it lies to us. And so we have to go back to the gospel. We go back to the gospel and say, Romans 8.32, If God did not spare his own Son for us, how will he not graciously give us all we need?

[20 : 55] See, when anxiety comes calling and says, God doesn't care about you, just look at the evidence all around you, you can point to the cross and say, nope, there's Jesus with nails in his hands and feet dying for you.

That really happens. That's the proof he cares. When you say, God doesn't have the power to deal with all the hard things going on, look at the empty tomb where Jesus rose victorious over the grave, defeated sin, defeated all spiritual evil, and he's promised to come back and make it all right. That's the objective proof that he's got the power to be at work in your life. And again, this gospel is going to tell you that, guess what? When you feel alone and abandoned, look at the cross with Jesus crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And you can know without a shadow of a doubt that no matter what you feel, because Jesus actually was forsaken, you will never be. When you feel betrayed and abandoned, look at Jesus abandoned in the garden by his disciples, and you can know that he is a sympathetic high priest, and he'll be with you.

When you go through loss and pain and suffering and death, look to Jesus, because he'll say to you, I've been there. I've walked that road for you.

[22 : 21] I'm with you in this road. And one day, that road will lead to resurrection life. Even if in this life, it doesn't work out the way you want.

But one day it will. That's a promise, he says. And as you're praying and giving thanks for God for what Jesus has done, and you're preaching that truth to yourself and thanksgiving as you pray, that's what helps you fight anxiety.

Because a God who would take nails in his hands and feet for me is the only person I want trusting my future to. I don't trust myself with my future.

I don't trust any of you with my future. You shouldn't trust me with your future. But I can trust God with the future because he's promised that in the end, there will be no more suffering, no more sickness, no more death, no more sin.

That's the future he's promised us. That's the future we cling to in the midst of anxiety. And so whether maybe right now you're wrestling with finding work or you're worried about losing work, what does it look like in that moment to pray and say, God, here's my real worries, but to rehearse to yourself ways that God's been good to you in the past, to give thanks for that, to rehearse how God's been faithful to you in Jesus.

[23 : 45] You might not get a job tomorrow, but I can guarantee you're going to approach tomorrow with a heart and mind guarded in Christ Jesus from anxiety in a way that wouldn't be if you weren't praying that way.

And we could do this for all kinds of things. Health scares, family scares, all kinds of things. We can stop and say, God, I'm going to bring this to you because you care. I'm going to bring my cares to you, and I'm going to pray with thanksgiving and trust that the peace that I have with you through Jesus will guard my heart and mind.

Now notice, though, that this is in Christ Jesus. And so this morning, if you're here and you're not sure if you're a follower of Jesus, I just want to encourage you that this peace that your heart longs for is only found in him, and he freely offers it to you.

This morning, you can know the peace of not having to fear death because Jesus died for you and promises you resurrection life. You cannot have to fear your sin and the consequences of it because Jesus died for your sin to wash you clean.

You cannot have to fear spiritual evil because Jesus has defeated it and can set you free from any bondage you are in. And so this morning, if you're not someone who is in Christ Jesus, I just want to invite you to put your trust in him, to see all he's done for you and say, Jesus, I'm going to trust you.

[25 : 17] I admit I fall short. I admit I need you. I'm going to trust you. And he can rescue you, adopt you in his family, and he can give you peace with God.

And maybe others of you this morning, you are believers in Jesus. And so this morning, I just want to invite you, whatever you're going through, whatever cares are on you, to take those cares, and if they're turning into anxiety or not, to bring them before God the Father who knows you more deeply than I do, whose spirit can speak comfort to you, who will point you back to the cross and bring that to him and say, Jesus, I've got nowhere else to go but you.

And as even the prophet Habakkuk says, whether the fig tree blossoms or not, whether there are cattle in the stalls or not, yet I will trust and praise the Lord my God.

And if Habakkuk could do that before Jesus ever died on the cross, then maybe as we lean into trusting Jesus and remember what he's done for us, we can trust him and even give thanks in the midst of our anxieties because of what he has done for us.

So brothers and sisters, 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.

[26 : 48] Amen? Let me pray for us. Amen. Amen. Father, Psalm 103 is coming to mind right now.

That you know our frame, that we are but dust, and as a father has compassion on a child, you have compassion on us. You know we live in a broken world, broken by our sin, the sins of others. You know we face daily challenges and burdens. And you invite us to come to you. You invite us to bring all the mess of our hearts and minds wherever they're at.

You invite us to bring them to you because you care for us. You invite us, Jesus, to know that you are the perfect high priest who knows everything we've gone through, and you are sympathetic to us.

You've gone through deeper waters than we have, and so we can trust our deep waters to you. So, Holy Spirit, I pray that every person here this morning would be bringing anything they have to you and that they would find that in you they have something to give thanks for.

[28 : 05] And as they come to you and give thanks, that the gospel be activated in their hearts and minds to remind them that you are the God who is Emmanuel, God with us.

Thank you, Jesus, that you are with us. You will never leave us or forsake us. And so we look to you and to you alone.

Pray this in your name. Amen.