

Tools for Times of Trouble

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[0 : 0 0] I'm going to be talking about something that Nate preached on just a couple of months ago, August 6th, I think it was, when I went back and looked. And I'm doing that not because I felt like anything that he said lacked.

Actually, it was a very good message, and I encourage you to go back and listen to it. But I'm hoping that as we address this subject matter again, that it will help assuage something that is ever-present.

But that presence of anxiety, that presence of worry, it's ever lurking. And so while Nate might have preached on it two months ago, I think probably between two months ago and now, you've had reason to be worried.

Anxiety has visited your household. And it could have been something really, really significant, something that really caused turmoil within your soul, or it might have been lighter. But nonetheless, when we are anxious, we are not at peace, and God promises us peace.

And so, taking a cue from a fellow named John Milton Gregory, who, by the way, if you've never read his book that was written at the end of the 19th century, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, it's a great book.

[1 : 1 2] He's a Christian, uses a lot of examples from the Bible. But he says one of the things that's most important in teaching is review. So, what we'll do tonight is probably come to some of the same ground that Nate covered, and I'm actually using one of the passages that he, was his primary passage that night.

And hopefully what I offer will reinforce what he said, but perhaps also bring it to light afresh. And, of course, not everybody was there at that time. Why do we talk about this?

Because anxiety or worry is always lurking. There's a report from the Mental Health Foundation, which is a UK charity, started in 1949. And they said this.

This was a report released just in May of this year, May 2023. Our new research reveals anxiety is gripping Scotland, as many people suffer in silence and struggle to cope.

Polling of 1,000 adults in Scotland found that 7 in 10 people, 70%, have felt anxious at least some time in the previous two weeks before they had done this study, while more than a quarter, 27%, of those with feelings of anxiety felt anxious to the extent that it stopped them from doing what they like or needed to do.

[2 : 2 4] And 1 in 5 people, 21%, felt anxious most of all or all of the time. And yet, despite it being so common, they report that the stigma and shame attached to it plays a part in how people deal with anxiety.

More than 4 in 10 adults in Scotland, 44%, with feelings of anxiety, keep it a secret. Worryingly, they say, 1 in 3 people, 30% with feelings of anxiety, say they are not coping well with those feelings.

This is worrying, they say, because chronic or long-term anxiety is associated with a higher risk of physical or mental health problems. And chief among the issues that cause anxiety is financial stress.

What causes anxiety? Why do we feel anxious? I'm going to suggest it's because when circumstances come along that expose our vulnerability, we feel anxious.

That is, we don't know what the future is going to happen. We don't know how a particular outcome is going to be of a circumstance. And we lack the power to prevent it or change it.

[3 : 34] And we feel vulnerable. And anxiety attends that feeling. Now, it's not a pleasant feeling. It's not a pleasant feeling.

But it's not necessarily negative. There is a positive aspect to anxiety. David Paulison talks about anxiety, when you get to the bottom of it, is a God-given capacity for knowing that something bad is going on in your world, either in the past, the present, or the future.

And this is not necessarily negative. Think of it this way, he says. Anxiety is like the red light flashing on your car's dashboard. When the check engine light goes on, you know something is wrong with your car.

You don't know exactly what's wrong, but you do know that it's time to visit the mechanic. Would you want to drive without those lights to warn you of an engine problem?

Probably not, he says. It's better to take care of the car trouble before you break down on the open road. So he's likening anxiety within us to something like that flashing red light.

[4 : 38] You've got to check something out. Something is wrong. And when we respond then positively in this feeling of anxiety, when we respond in the way that God directs us to respond, we have greater hope that indeed we'll find that place of peace.

And Christians, we're not immune to anxiety. I know you're not. And the Lord knows this, and he is not indifferent. In truth, he is our greatest resource.

Now we're going to look at two passages of Scripture that offer what I'm suggesting are tools for times of trouble. Tools for times of trouble. See, Colin is wearing off of me. I'm using these alliterations all the time.

Tools for times of trouble. There are tools for combating anxiety. And one's from Matthew. And it's going to involve observation that leads to assurance.

And one is from Paul, the Apostle Paul. And it's prayer and supplication with thanksgiving that leads to peace. So let's look first at the Matthew passage if you want to turn back there.

[5 : 48] It begins with, Therefore I tell you, Jesus is speaking, Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life. Now, there's an old saying which says if you see a therefore, go see what it's there for.

A therefore always points you back to whatever came before it, right? Well, just before this, there are three little teachings of Jesus. One that's the one about don't lay up your treasures on earth, but rather in heaven.

Because where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. And then he talks about how the eye is a lamp of the body and a healthy eye. An eye that sees things as they really are allows you to be full of light.

And then lastly, he says, No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

I'd suggest that those three teachings ask these kinds of questions. What are you looking to for your security? What are you focused on?

[6 : 51] What is demanding your attention? Because at the very end of our passage, Jesus says, Seek first the kingdom of God. See, our focus in times of anxiety, circumstances that cause us to worry, our focus should be on God.

He is the one who must demand our attention. But don't think that by God asking that of us, or telling us that that is indeed what we need to do in our response, is something that's restrictive.

Jesus offers that keeping our focus on God and his kingdom is what liberates, what frees us from worry and anxiety. So what does he say?

Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Here are two aspects of our existence that involve our most basic fears.

Fear of want and fear of harm. Fear of want and fear of harm. See, if we're concerned about our clothing, it's a concern that we're being exposed to the elements, that we'll somehow, we'll not have what we need to protect us from those forces outside of us.

[8 : 04] And for fear of want, if we're not going to have enough food, we need food. But Jesus brings up these two most basic fears. Fear of want and fear of harm.

And anxiety rises from feelings of vulnerability, our lack of control over circumstances that pose a threat to us. And such feelings have the ability to cause us to lose focus.

They begin to demand our attention. When Jesus says our attention needs to be on God. But the anxiety and circumstances cause us to lose focus and demand our attention elsewhere.

So he says, Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on, is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

It's a rhetorical question. What's the answer? Yes, life is more than just these material things. He says, Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

[9 : 10] Are you not more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to the span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.

They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. You know, more than likely, Jesus is teaching outside. And you can imagine he's sitting there and he's talking to them.

And he says, Don't be anxious about your life, about what you'll eat, what you'll drink and what you'll wear. I mean, look, look. Look at the birds. Look at that bird.

And they sit and they watch the bird pick up some seeds off the ground. And he says, Your heavenly Father, they don't reap.

They don't sow. They don't toil. They don't reap. But your heavenly Father takes care of them. And then he gestures over to this direction. And there's a field stretched out of green grass with all these lilies covering it.

[10 : 07] And he says, Look at that. Look at that. God sowed closed grass, which is going to be gathered up and burned. And yet, look how he closed them.

Something more glorious than Solomon ever owned. Look at the birds of the air. Look at the flowers in the field. Are you not more value than they? Indeed.

The rhetorical answer to that is yes. Yes. You are of more value than that. See, Jesus is pointing to the fact that we as human beings, made in the image of God, are the crown of God's creation.

And he cares about us as image bearers. He cares about us as those who are his offspring. And if he's going to take care of birds, provide for them, and if he's going to clothe the grass, we can have confidence as his image bearers that indeed he will take care of us.

Are you of not more value? Jesus expects the answer, a roaring answer from the crowd. Yes, we are of more value. But there's even more to what Jesus says.

[11 : 17] See, Jesus adds an even greater degree of God's care by making a distinction between his people and the Gentiles, that is, those who are not in covenantal relationship.

Listen to what he says. Do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

See, God has a particular relationship with his people. And those of us here in this room, or anybody who's following online, if you've got a relationship with God through faith in Christ, if you have been reconciled to him by faith in Christ, you have particular reason to believe that God will make sure that you have food to eat and clothes to wear, that he will meet you in your moments of anxiety and of fear.

Remember what he said to Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 7, For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations. He says that to Israel.

[12 : 36] And here we are, inheritors. Paul calls us the true Israel because we have placed our faith in indeed the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul says, 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? This morning, what did we do?

Part of the service was we shared communion this morning here. And at one point during the service, the elements were lifted up and says, given for you.

Given for you. See, we occupy a particular place in God's covenantal love. And we are to take comfort from the knowledge that not only as image bearers can we trust that we are more valued than the grass of the field and the birds of the air, but we are of particular value to God because he's purchased us with the shed blood of his son.

The most precious element that ever fell upon the earth, the blood of Jesus was shed for you and for me as believers in Christ. So Jesus says, Gentiles seek after all these things, but your heavenly father knows that you need them.

[13 : 57] So he says, seek first, therefore, and the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. Get your focus back on him. Get your focus back on the one who has chosen you, has purchased you, has sustained you, and has put before you a hope and glory that cannot be taken away.

Get your focus back on him. He doesn't deny the reality of the circumstances that create anxiety. He doesn't turn a blind eye to them. He doesn't say, listen, get over it.

He realizes what's going on, but at the same time, he says, I am your greatest resource. Trust. Trust that I know who you are, what you're going through, and I will provide all that you need in the circumstance which is presenting itself that creates this anxiety, this worry.

See, he draws a distinction, essentially saying, the Gentiles seek assurance in what they can do, laying treasures up on this earth. Yeah? That they become a slave, a servant of money.

They seek assurance in what they can do, but we are to seek assurance in what God is doing. I'm suggesting in this that that Jesus is offering some very simple tools for times of trouble.

[15 : 20] observation of God's care and all that he has made. So listen, the next time you are really stressed about something and your head just can't get off of it, let me suggest that you find a way to get out of wherever you are, take a walk in Queens Park and Victoria Park and all the many parks of Glasgow and look for a bird as it flies and it comes down and pulls some worm out of the ground and say, look at that.

Look at that. God, thank you for showing me that bird, for reminding me that you care for your creation and that you care for me. And if you think about, you know, I was here when all the hydrangea bushes, you know, they're so gorgeous, these big things that crown these bushes.

Yet when they're gone, the bushes are really pretty ugly. There's really not a whole lot to commend them, but you wait each year for that to come out. And you know, if you're in a position to see that or the turning of the leaves in autumn, you remind yourself, God is able to dress up his inanimate earth with things of beauty.

And here I am, a living, living, breathing soul that God has redeemed through the gift of his son. It seems simple, but it seems to be what Jesus is offering us as a tool to combat our anxiety.

And there are ready object lessons available all around us that give us assurance of our value, particularly of us as his covenant people. Now, at the end of that passage, the end of that section that we're reading there in Matthew, he says, Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

[17 : 08] It's an important admonition, an important command, because what happens in trial is that you have two options. You can either let the trial drive you away from God or drive you closer to God.

That's your option. The trial can drive you away from God or it can drive you closer to God. In the midst of that anxiety, you can make a decision, you know, I'm just going to turn a blind eye, God's not there to help me, I'm going to move away and somehow you're going to find comfort somewhere else in who knows what else.

But God says, you are to pursue me. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. All these things will be added to you. We put God back in focus.

And to that end, then, I think it's important we look at what Paul has to say in Philippians chapter 4. So if that first set of tools, as it were, is observation of God's care of all that he has made, now we're going to see that he's provided tools through prayer, excuse me, prayer, supplication with thanksgiving.

And these are, well, these are tools to battle anxiety, prayer, supplication with thanksgiving. You know, what does the passage start out with? Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.

[18 : 25] Yeah, well, you know, Paul is writing this letter from prison. He is literally in chains and yet he's calling everybody to rejoice. So it's not like he's sitting, you know, in the front seat of a Rolls Royce tooling down the highway, going down to the beach, have a couple of beers, maybe a gin and tonic when he gets there.

No, he's sitting in prison and he says rejoice. And again, I say rejoice because he knows that God is available.

He knows that God is present in such circumstances that no matter what the trial or anxiety that brings the anxiety or discomfort of worry that we have. He knows that God is present and he has a purpose and we'll talk about that more in just a bit.

He says, let your reasonableness be known to everybody. This is so variously translated. It can mean gentleness. It could mean forbearing. And it seems to be related to how it is that we are perceived by others.

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. Let your graciousness, let your gentleness be known to everyone. See, what Paul is asking for is a lack of striving in our souls that affect our interactions, our life with others.

[19 : 40] Again, what happens with things that cause us worry and anxiety is it just draws our attention away from God and totally onto ourselves. And what we worry about is us.

And what he's asking of these people that he's writing to is that he said, listen, what I want from you is that I want people to see you as someone who is gracious, who is able to endure, who is able to bear up, who can continue to look out for the other even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

And then he says this, the Lord is at hand. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness, your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is at hand. I think that's a statement that echoes the words of Jesus in our Matthew passage. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. God is present.

God is with us in these circumstances that cause us anxiety. And then he goes on to say this, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God.

[20 : 50] Again, trials can drive us away from God or they can press us into God. And Paul is saying you want to press into God. He uses these two words, prayer and supplication.

Prayer and supplication. Prayer is a kind of general term about indeed approaching God in prayer, but supplication. Supplication could be translated as pleading, begging.

There's an urgency to the prayer. And see, I think Paul totally recognizes, Jesus totally recognizes we are in a fallen world. We ourselves are so vitiated in our capacity to deal with the brokenness of this world.

That there's going to be times when we feel as though we have no options, no way out. And what does Paul say? Don't run from God. Press to him. In fact, press in on him.

Plead, plead, plead. And he says to do it, however, with thanksgiving. And I think there's two ways for us to consider what he means by that in thanksgiving.

[21 : 51] What is thanksgiving? But expressing of gratitude for benefits or blessing. Expressing gratitude for benefits or blessing. And as we pray about our present trials, we must not forget past blessings.

See, as we are going through something, what God wants us to remember is how he has been faithful in the past. What are Israel's festivals but over and over again reminding the people of God of God's faithfulness to his covenant love.

I delivered you out of Egypt? Have a festival. I brought in the harvest. Have a festival. You know, they are reminded continually of God's steadfast love for them. And so, as we pray, as we press into God, as we plead, as we beg, Paul says, do it with thanksgiving.

Remind yourself of what God has done in your life in the past. Someone suggested, and I read this a long time ago, that families ought to have a jar on their kitchen counter.

And what's in that jar are slips of paper of answered prayers for that family. So that, you know, when your dog ran away and everybody was sitting around a table praying and the dog comes back, you write it out, you put it in there.

[23 : 03] Or sometime, you didn't know you had enough money to pay for the bills at the end of the month, but it all came in. Somehow you had that extra bit of work and you write it out, put it in the paper and put it in there. So that when the next time comes, you actually open up that jar, you pull it out and you go, God was faithful.

He answered that prayer. He can do it again. See, that's the kind of thanksgiving that allows us to pursue the promised peace that God has by going back and reminding ourselves of what God is doing.

But there's another thing. There's another thing that might be going on because circumstances that cause anxiety are circumstances in which we feel something is beyond our control and there is something that threatens.

But what? What if there's a purpose behind this circumstance? What if God is doing something in our life that demonstrates, as Jesus said, that life is more than food or clothing?

What if he is giving us an opportunity to pray with Jesus, not my will, but your will be done? Listen to what Paul says from Romans 5, 1 through 5.

[24 : 10] Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

We've been justified by faith, something in the past that has given us access to this grace in which we stand, our present, and we look forward to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, the future.

But he says this, not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, the present sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

See, these circumstances that bring worry and anxiety might just be something that God has allowed, brought into our life to teach us that he loves us.

You know, you look at it, you go, God, if you loved me, you wouldn't let this happen. But he says, I'm letting it happen because I love you. Because I want you to experience what it's like to persevere, to press through, to accept the will of God, to fight, to hold on to him in the midst of dire circumstances.

[25 : 28] I want you to share in the sufferings of Christ. I want you to know what it was like for your Savior to go through the agony of Gethsemane.

What it was like for your Savior to have to wrestle with the fact that he knew he would be cut off from his heavenly Father for the first time ever in his entire human existence. See, there might be something else going on and that's something for which to give thanks.

As painful and as difficult as that might be to comprehend, it is something for which we are to give thanks. Indeed, Paul even says to rejoice in it because God is giving us a chance to experiencing him in a newer and deeper way.

Remember, trials can push us away or they can bring us closer to God and here we're being pressed, pleading with thanksgiving. And what's the outcome of this, Paul says?

The outcome is the peace of God. The peace of God which will guard our hearts and our minds. You know, peace in the Bible is more than just an absence of strife.

[26 : 33] That is, you know, you could have a neighbor who's just a nasty neighbor and you just fought with this guy all the time. He leaves garbage in your driveway, he plays his music too loud, he leaves broken beer bottles all over the place and you know, you just, you tried, you pleaded, you tried to be nice, you get angry, finally the guy moves and you go, hallelujah, hallelujah, that guy is gone.

Well, that's one kind of peace. But the kind of peace that the Bible envisions is a peace of reconciliation. We have been justified by faith, therefore we have peace with God.

That is, the enmity is taken away. The enmity is not just moved away, it's been taken away. And so, when we pray in the manner that Paul is saying, we go to him, making our requests known, we're praying with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, what God is promising is that we will come to a place where we are greater assured of God's love for us, his care for us and his provision for us.

Because God is not undone by anything that takes place in our life. There is nothing greater than God. God is greater than the greatest fear we face. So as we pray to him, he communicates back to us that all is well.

all is well. Remember, see, Gentiles seek assurance in what they can do. We seek assurance in what God is doing. And that peace that he promises is something that will guard our hearts and minds.

[28 : 09] And it literally is the word used for standing people on a wall with making sure that the enemy doesn't get in. God will guard our hearts. We learn to trust him in all circumstances and rather than anxiety gripping us, we are at a place of confidence in God, of trusting God that allows peace to prevail in our lives.

So, anxiety is real. We are creatures, not God. We don't know the end from the beginning. We don't have the power to control all circumstances.

We are what we are. We're human beings, fallen human beings, but we have a God who is greater than the greatest fears we face. And though we're creatures, not operating at our full potential because of sin, God understands this.

I mean, what does Jesus say at the end of Matthew chapter 6? Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. See, they're not ignoring the fact, the reality. Jesus is saying, listen, trust God for today. He will meet you today. Trust God for tomorrow.

[29 : 22] He will meet you for tomorrow. Trust God for the next day. He will meet you in the next day. When we allow anxiety to just begin to build on itself to where we're anxious about being anxious, it's called free-floating anxiety.

It doesn't even have a target anymore. It's just something that we have no control over. And Jesus is trying to warn us away from that to trust that indeed we are of value to our Heavenly Father.

He knows what it is that we need. And He's given us a tool of prayer, of supplication, of giving thanks for what God has done and what He is doing in the midst of our difficult circumstances. We can deduce from God's provision of the rest of His creation His particular care for us, His image bearers, and even more so as His own special people.

And we do not need to be held captive by the things that create anxiety within us, but to release them, release those circumstances into God's hands by praying to Him with increasing confidence in His ever-present love.

And He promises that His peace, a peace that belongs to Him, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Anxiety is real.

[30 : 34] Jesus knows it. Our Heavenly Father knows it. The Apostle Paul knows it. It is something that comes with who we are and what we are at this point in our earthly existence. But I believe He's provided some very simple tools.

One, again, just look about us. Secondly, prayer. He's given us access to His throne of grace so that we can make our requests known.

And there, as we stand before our Heavenly Father, as we come before Him in prayer, He promises peace. We can be reconciled to the reality that whatever we're in, God is aware of it.

He is present with it. The Lord is at hand. And so we learn to trust Him. There's this, oh, I don't know, what would you call it?

Camp hymn from the late 1800s. Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him. How I proved Him or and or. Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus.

[31 : 34] Oh, for grace to trust Him more. I always loved that line, how I proved Him or and or. As the writer talks about it, that in these circumstances I've gone to Jesus, I've placed my trust in Jesus and He's never failed me.

He's always proved to be what He promises to be. So, anxiety is real. God's given us tools to deal with our anxiety.

Let's make use of them. And let's help one another to make use of them. You know, as we read in that report that people hide in it because they're shamed. It's a stigma.

No, no, we have to put that aside. We deal with reality in the church. We deal with life as it really is. And so, when we're anxious, we find someone else and we say, will you pray with me? Will you remind me of God's presence?

We pull out that thing out of the jar that's on our countertop. We put it down and we pray over it. We say, thank you, God. Thank you, God. Thank you, God. You delivered us before. You'll deliver us again. And in this, we can take competence.

[32 : 34] And here's the