

# Anxiety & Rejoicing

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Preacher: Nate Taylor

[ 0 : 0 0 ] so chances are for the people in this room your life will not be massively affected by a famine in the coming year anybody worried about that anybody worried in the coming year there's going to be a famine and your life is going to completely change if you live in different parts of the world it's a bigger reality and if you've lived lived in different times in human history that would be a yearly thing that you would worry and stress about what about pythons anybody scared about pythons now they are scary but in scotland are you scared but you have adders right like that's the only land animal danger that we have in the uk pretty much it's why my kids agreed to move here with us they were i i read them a book called little house in the big woods when they were too young and so they were terrified of bears and panthers and i promised them there's no bears in st louis guys and then later that night i looked on facebook and somebody had a picture in the neighboring community of a bear i felt like a big liar but scotland we're okay right what about pythons though i was reading a study by a herpetologist that's somebody who studies reptiles and amphibians this guy worked out of cornell university and he studied this tribe in i think it's called the agta tribe in the philippines and all the men were hunters and the group was like 120 people and about six men died every year from a python attacking them i don't know about you but those odds are way too high for me sounds terrifying you want to know what's interesting though they also did a study on anxiety and worry in that tribe and it was less than the rates in scotland it's kind of interesting right we have all these medical advancements all these engineering advancements all these scientific advancements and yet anxiety rates are starting to soar and go through the roof all these things has it made us more happy and less worried i don't know one i was doing some reading this week one in five people in scotland report to feel anxious almost all of the time and those numbers like skyrocket if it's just some of the time it's like multiple times in the year they have bouts of anxiety it goes way way up one in five feel anxious pretty much all the time it's pretty prevalent half of that number of those one in five half of them completely kept it a secret from other people despite it being so prevalent there's a stigma attached to it and nobody wants to admit that they might feel anxious happens to men and women i think with men we like to say things like i'm not anxious i'm just stressed i'm just i'm busy at work right there's a another study on mental health in scotland done in 2018 and it found that three in four adults felt stressed and overwhelmed and unable to cope at some point in the past year before the study in america um anxiety is the most commonly diagnosed mental health disorder i think estimates are now over 40 million people in the united states struggle been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and the struggle with stress anxiety and worry you know it can manifest itself in all sorts of physical ailments right talk to a doctor and they can tell you the list of things how anxiety is terrible for our health right it can cause um ulcers it can cause high blood pressure it can cause heart disease it can cause migraines all sorts of things digestive issues and it's pretty democratic too because it comes no matter whether

you don't have much money or you have a lot of money or you're somewhere in between anxiety doesn't care it can come and find you what are the things that we worry about i mean like the list is too long right you'd be here till monday finances our children politics work grades our health the church our church the future the past what people think our physical appearance we worry about sleep we worry about death we even worry about worry we're really good at worrying and nowadays we have this thing called social media where we open it up and we feel uh this they call it fomo anybody heard that but fear of missing out right it's like everybody else is having this magical anxiety free existence and their kids are perfectly behaving all smiling at some wedding in their kilts meanwhile you know you're struggling and thinking i must be the only one and we get this dopamine hit even when we post something and people hit like or love oh even better right or oh even i don't know which one you like the most do you like the the uh laughing face is that one that helps you feel better and if we don't get enough we feel this anxiety we have this tyranny of email and texts right where we feel like we have to respond right away what was it like in the good old days when they didn't have telephones it's just all handwritten letters and like i'll get back to you in three months if it's four months be worried give it three months right some of us are even anxiety addicts it's we feel like the only way we can actually be productive in life as if we work up some sort of anxiety in our lives or we feel like there's might there might be even something wrong like we're not actually living life in the right way unless we feel anxious you have all these medical advancements and all this you know all this information and so what do we do i'm feeling a little under the weather so i'm going to just put my symptoms into google web md into the nhs and at the end of it you're like i either have a common cold or the bubonic plague is back right and it makes us worry and we feel anxious you know a little humorous there but i'm not trying to make light of any of this this is this is a real struggle for so many it's a struggle that i've had i feel anxious i felt i was talking to steven as i came in i was running late things were kind of scrambled and i felt anxious i was coming oh lord huh maybe i should listen to my own sermon as i'm preaching it and what your word has to say uh that even this last week our son ollie fell and broke his collarbone and this was two days before he was supposed to travel for the dow wedding and that and then two sermons this way and it's like ah i felt anxiety and fear and worry whelming up inside of me even had full transparency back in my my early to mid 20s you know not that long ago guys not that long ago he reassures himself um i even had a couple panic attacks haven't had them since had a couple of panic attack panic attacks it was absolutely no fun and in to this anxious world we read this command from paul in philippians 4 don't be anxious about anything oh thanks paul i'll just stop right really fun sermon illustration and intro right you know in the context of philippians though it's pretty important the context of where's paul's writing from because if you were to read through the whole book we're kind of jumping in here at the end but paul talks about joy all the time it's just full of joy and you know where paul's writing from prison he's in prison he keeps writing about joy and he doesn't stop um even in the passage that we just read did you hear what he said he said

rejoice practice joy be full of joy rejoice again i'm serious about it i'm going to repeat it so you make sure that i know that i really want you to do this again i say rejoice and i don't know about you but sometimes read passages like that and you're like how is there a secret i'm missing out on is there some spiritual truth that i'm just supposed to kind of put over my life that's supposed to make it or okay is this just for certain people have i messed up too much because i struggle with anxiety in different ways is this even possible or fair let's talk about that but first let me pray that god would help us as we look at this passage father we um we come to you and we admit there might even be many things worrying us this very minute would you calm our anxious fears if it's not your will to calm our fears as they creep into our mind would you grant us the faith to wait for you to speak to us and to comfort us would you bless the preaching of your word so that we can be more human by the end of it well would you confront disrupt and redirect us by your holy spirit we pray this in the name of jesus amen all right three point outline and it's this the problem of anxiety the characteristics of anxiety and then lastly the healing of anxiety okay the problem the characteristics and the healing and i could probably start by saying this up front this isn't everything to say about anxiety it's something to say about it from this part of god's word but first off the problem of anxiety i haven't seen this yet i don't know if this exists in scotland but in the united states there's advertisements on tv for um security alarm systems for your home do you guys have these here in america and maybe they're the exact same thing so maybe i'm just going to describe the same thing they're terrifying in america so what's happening is probably it's usually like a mom and her kids are alone and it's night time and they're watching tv and of course all their windows are open some guy with like you know a ski mask on and a crowbar comes and he's looking through the window at night and it's preying what on your fears on your fears and then all of a sudden they see the sticker for the security alarm system on your window and they're like oh we can't do this you know it'll make too much of a noise or it'll call the police and so we've got to go away buy our security system and it sells it works why because the advertisers know something we have fears we have worries we have anxiety and if it can shine the spotlight on that and it what it offers some sort of hope for it i don't really like those things it's just this truth that we get afraid of things you know it's the question what makes you anxious like what what's popping into your mind right now paul says in verse 6 of philippians 4 don't be anxious in fact don't be anxious about anything you're like okay i'm not anxious but can i can i be anxious about these two things paul and he says no don't be anxious about anything you don't have to be right that sounds hard and we're going to come back to that later because i think we can read it in the wrong tone but for now i just want to point out that paul is just recognizing something here on that the bible is replete in references to and it's this we are prone to worry and anxiety and fear what is the most repeated command in scripture don't be afraid don't be afraid why because we get afraid right we tend to fear things i don't know about you but

sometimes if you just read your bible you can get stressed out by all the anxious people within it some examples adam and eve they fear that god is withholding something and so they go after what the serpent offers right abraham and sarah they're worried that god's not actually going to come through with his promise of a child jacob he's anxious worried that that that there's not going to be enough blessing for him and so he goes and he steals it mooses he's totally freaked out that he has to do this public speaking thing and that god's not actually going to speak through him and he and he demurs again and again no god you can't possibly use me now israel they can't shake this idea that god's led them out of egypt into the wilderness and he's just going to abandon them even you get to the new testament the disciples are terrified of dying in the storm on the sea thinking that jesus actually cares more about sleep than about their lives you know peter he's there and he fears in his fear he's denying jesus and the command it keeps coming don't fear don't be anxious paul's just stating that in a different way anxiety is fear metastasized and there's a clarification here too because i think that there's different degrees of worrying and fear um because i think a lot of the questions i've found with people who struggle with anxiety myself included you read a passage like this and you're like well that's a command so if i don't do it am i just like the worst christian ever am i just sinning all the time and and i think some nuance is important in answering a question like that with anxiety that comes to our life i don't want to just say yes you don't want to just say no you want to explore it with them i mean think about it in a sense some sort of some some fear is good because we live in a broken world in a world where things don't go right so if you know after the service the child goes out on and steps into crowd without looking you know there should be some anxiety that wells up inside us some fear that they're going to harm themselves because that's the thing that triggers us to go and to rescue them right um not only that anxiety can also be something that plagues us because we live in a sinful world is it sin well in one sense sin touches everything right if we've been in genesis we've seen that sin touches everything and so not only do our hearts not respond in the right way but our minds don't work our bodies don't work the way that they're supposed to there can be chemical imbalances and things like that there can be sin that we commit but there can be sin that's committed against us there's trauma that people go through that they didn't struggle with and causes anxiety in their life right and it's not to say that the bible the bible is very helpful in this but we also want to make sure that we're not diagnosing a problem that can be helped um through a medication just like you might take some medication to help your blood pressure you take a medication to help your anxiety right i don't want to say you know the minister i'm going to do my minister part in talking about anxiety but i am not your um your family doctor okay so it's okay to need a counselor or a therapist somebody specially trained to assess and help you and it's interesting too when you're talking about anxiety because paul he's actually mentioned anxiousness earlier in ephesians chapter 2 uh verse 28 he writes in reference uh that his friend epaphroditus he overcame an illness that almost killed him epaphroditus was sent by this church in philippi he was coming and he got sick along the way and he almost died from it and paul he had great concern for epaphroditus and he says this i am the more eager to send him epaphroditus therefore that you may rejoice at seeing him again and that i may be less anxious

that's interesting right basically saying it's natural to feel anxious when you know someone that you're care you care about um is not doing well and reverse if they're if they're doing better some anxiety um goes away when paul says that there's not the slightest bit of him hinting that he was sinning in being anxious that and hoping that epaphroditus would come through and be okay so a lot of times we stop um before we get started because we feel the stigma about anxiety that just to mention it is to confess the deepest darkest sin in the world and somehow we're weak and a subpar christian before we get going and this is the problem of anxiety i'll plead with you if this is your mo this is your modus operandi this is how you live in the world my guess is it's not working very well for you to just hide it like it's not there it's not a big deal there's some tips later but you got to start with that uh in another sense when we say is anxiety actually a sin um well it can be right a lot of times our hearts are are turned towards idolatries to put things in the place of god and so sometimes we have to ask questions why am i feeling anxious well a lot of times it's because our idols are being attacked we idolize the approval of others and so we stress about what we say and how we look you relieve a conversation you're like i said that thing and they must think i am the biggest idiot in the whole world you can't shake it you're so anxious about what they think a lot of times guess what they person doesn't really maybe they did think that i don't know but who cares right that can make us uh fear and have anxiety because we idolize what others think we idolize com um comfort and so we're constantly checking our bank account anxious thinking we need more we idolize romance so we skip from relationship to relationship uh fretting that we just have to find that right person to fill us to validate us to sweep us off our feet there's this counselor his name's uh dan allender and he says this different people fear different things with different levels of intensity but all of us fear what we cannot control fear is provoked when the threat of danger exposes our inability to preserve what we most deeply cherish you catch that that there is a sinful idolatrous nature to to we want to be god and to be in control of things right there's an anxiety that wells up sometimes you can't do anything about but but the point in this is when that comes what are you going to do with it are you going to feed it are you going to bring it to god and to others all right so just just one phrase i've talked about there's this problem of anxiety second thing though is the characteristics of anxiety in this little um passage from verses four through nine i think it ties together really nicely it's interesting i was reading one commentary and it's basically like paul is just giving a random list of commands here at the end of his letter i i don't think that makes any sense so i think it's pretty plain that paul's trying to tie all this stuff together what gets in the way of rejoice if he wants you to have joy if he wants you to rejoice what gets in the way of that anxiety right what's the opposite of anxiety verse four rejoicing verse seven peace right those are pretty good definitions of something that's the opposite of it and then verse eight he says do these things and in verse nine again he references the god of peace all that to say i think what paul is saying here is our joy and our life with god and his people get blocked when we're plagued with anxiety and so to talk about the characteristics of anxiety from this passage i think it's just the absence of some of these good

[ 20 : 21 ] things that paul lists he gives these commands of what to do and kind of the opposite of his start to see what an anxious person looks like he'd say a lot of things i'm going to say three things here characteristics of anxiety distancing yourself from others magnifying issues and then forgetting god and his promises so first off distancing yourself from others his command is what rejoice okay again mention this many times in sermons how do you hear that how do you hear that as a modern western person you probably hear i am supposed to rejoice it's hard to rejoice paul uh in english we don't have the second person plural if we were using the glasgow authorized version uh it would say rejoice use rejoice all of you it's a plural command and so the idea that paul is saying isn't hey listen you individual you better be rejoicing all the time instead what he's saying is to be a community of joy one when somebody is down the other person is lifting them up where we're bearing what another's burdens where we see this task of joy as being one that's covenantal and community oriented that your neighbor's anxiety is actually your problem because you see what does anxiety do instead of that this beautiful picture of joy in community instead our anxiety when that starts to feed into the system it starts to draw people apart right an anxious system doesn't hold it starts to draw people apart and so our natural tendency in anxiety is to retreat we isolate we don't engage we get obsessed with whatever is stressing us out to the neglect of community so if you find yourself constantly not letting other people in being like i'm too much of a burden right this isn't some it's nobody actually wants to hear this right these are signs that anxiety is starting to take over our life when we retreat and we are very good at retreating and we tend to self-medicate our anxiety with just a huge list of things whether it's whiskey or video games or netflix or over exercising or sleeping pills or work or images on the internet there's this amazing lengths we will go to to try to try to escape our anxiousness and a lot of times as we try to go to those things to escape what do you lose you lose you lose community you start to be more and more isolated in that and it's sad and so many times we just want to put a quick fix on it there's this movie i saw a number of years ago called little miss sunshine uh it's about a family this very dysfunctional family and they travel across the united states in this old vw van the whole family together although their idiosyncrasies and weirdness in order to take their youngest daughter i think it's olive to a beauty pageant to be crowned little miss sunshine and the older brother in the movie he's taken a vow of silence because he wants to go and join the air force and he's so committed to this this is going to change his life that he says i'm not going to speak until i go and i enlist and somewhere along the way in the movie um they find out that his eyesight isn't good he can't read different signs along the road and his uncle says to him oh do you know that you actually can't enlist in the air force with eyesight like that and so this boy who hasn't spoken at all through the first part of the movie all of a sudden lets out a shriek and he doesn't

stop screaming and they pull over the van to the side of the road in the middle of the desert and they open up the doors and he runs out and he's like ah and it's so funny there's all these different adults these you know the grown-ups in the movie and they're coming there and they're trying to comfort they're there and they're giving these platitudes and little things and it's not helping them at all and he's screaming and he's screaming and he's screaming and along comes all of his little sister and she comes and she she falls down in the dirt next to him and she puts her little head into his shoulder and he stops screaming she just she's there for a moment they stop they stand up they get in the and the movie continues you see so many times we want to deal with our anxiety with these little these little phrases and things like that or we feel like you should just be able to deal with it on our own but we have been given the gift of community to allow and invite other people in and you get to do that for one another to be present to be the hands and feet of christ to one another and to remember the promise is that that that the lord is at hand that he's there with you in the midst of those things he doesn't want to run away from you actually wants to enter in that's one characteristic is distancing yourself from others second characteristic characteristic of anxiety is magnifying issues on this connects to community aspect we just talked about in a way verse five it says let your reasonableness let your reasonableness be known to everyone let your reasonableness be known to everyone one commentary notes it says this reasonableness is crucial for maintaining community it's the disposition that seeks what is best for others not one's self now here's the thing anxiety it can well up from real threats in the world again we're not trying to minimize it the bible's never calling bad things good or trying to say like hey just pull yourself up by your bootstraps no it's religion of grace right god enters in he helps us when we can't help ourselves um but in this there can be real threats but a lot of times what our anxiety does it either takes things that aren't threats or it takes these real threats and it magnifies them right it blows them up it makes them bigger than they actually are not saying that they aren't real things that stress you out um and so here's here's what can be helpful in your anxiety is to name it right because because what's going on in your mind is you're you're slowly you're you're trying this thing is snowballing it's growing out of proportion to name it and to say specifically what is the thing say it to god say it to somebody else what is making me anxious because you see the lie in our anxiety is that the problem is infinite and there is no way to deal with it but actually the problem it's not endless right it's finite and it's very specific not saying it's not a real thing but it's finite and it's specific and so to name that can help rather than magnifying it if we can learn to identify these things and sometimes it's physical signs that you might have if you're going to overeating uh if you have headaches it allows you to say oh no what's going on right what is this actual thing and to be able to name it they're real they're hard but our anxiety tends to magnify these things and so you test your anxiety am i being reasonable let your reasonableness be known your reasonableness that's hard to say you dispute you argue with your anxiety third characteristic of anxiety is that it forgets god and his promises i'll talk about this more in a second but paul he actually gives you reasons not to be anxious it's not just this command out of the blue that in your own power you're supposed to do it right he says verse five the lord is at hand

most commentaries point out saying that that is this promise that's this this truth that god is going to come that jesus is going to come back and he is going to right every wrong so many times we feel anxious because we feel out of control right there's these problems and i can't do anything about it and the promise of the gospel is that there is a god who sees and a god who acts and a god who will one day someday right every wrong that helps verse seven the peace of god will guard you characteristic anxiety is it forgets god's promise the peace of god will guard you it's a military term for an army surrounding a city to face attackers that's what god is like towards the issues in your life verse nine the god of peace will be with you because he hears the thing when we start to feel anxious do you know what happens the promises of god just kind of ring hollow you're like god of peace will guard me who cares i feel too anxious right but there's this thing he says instead of being anxious in everything with prayer and supplication make your requests known to god see you get to bring these things to god in prayer right we get to rehearse god's promises in prayer as we talk to him we get to practice giving thanks rather than this focusing on all that could go wrong in prayer we get to be reoriented to the god of peace to have commune with communion with him to remember that he that he's for us that he's with us right in prayer it's that you're you are the child who's going and asking their father to help in prayer we get to feed our belief um that god wins by praying your kingdom come your will be done and forgive me if this sounds condescending and simple and too simplistic but i'm just trying to say exactly what the bible says here as we're as we're struggling with anxiety and it's characteristic of forgetting god's promises um here's a little tip from the apostle paul it's from verse eight think about good things our anxiety you know it it focuses in and it only sees the bad things so paul says in verse eight whatever is true honorable just pure lovely commendable worthy of praise think on these things like is paul just saying like imagine unicorns and rainbows and everything's going to be fine no he's saying fix your mind on stuff that inspires worship in you that orients you to god and his world it's not a waste of money to take um young people on trips to see waterfalls and mountains to go on hikes there's goodness remembering that there's something bigger than us that there's a god who created this right get outside and walk a martin luther whenever he was stressed and feeling anxious and feeling depressed he would pray more read his bible more and go outside more maybe turn off the news we have this thing called a smartphone that has you know so many things that are beneficial to us and so many things that are harmful and one of them is i don't know how to turn it off i get apple news alerts and it tells me every single awful horrible thing that happens in the world you weren't created to know everything there's enough stuff in your city and country and the big stuff in the world and in your own life and your own family you can fast from being a news junkie who sees every horrible thing in the world you're allowed to do that that's okay you don't have to know all those things whatever's worthy of praise right think about those things delight in them and paul says in verse 9 what you've seen in me practice these things there's this element again of community

where we say this is why it's important to share struggles with these things so other people all of a sudden go oh right it's not just me and they can come and they they there's an invitation as you share for that person to come and to share their struggle and just to go hey you don't have to be perfect how have you dealt with this who have you talked to what are your practices how have you gotten through this situation would you mind like texting me scripture once a week you mind just checking in do you mind not trying to fix everything just coming and being with me going on a walk together it's not that hard sometimes but we try to make it more complicated than it actually is seeing the problem the characteristics last thing is the healing of anxiety paul says don't be anxious about anything okay i told you i'd come back to how we read those things sometimes it just it sounds harsh sometimes right there is this old american comedian named bob newhart um he's been on tv forever and different um talk shows and he's on the sketch show once and he has he's playing this character um who's a psychologist a therapist there to help people and this woman walks into his office he says hi how are you doing she says i'm doing oh and i'm actually not doing too well um i have these fears i'm really struggling with anxiety and he said will you tell me more about those fears and that anxiety and she says sure um you know i have this fear of being buried alive in a box and he says oh well that that sounds terrible uh did anybody ever try to bury you alive in a box and she says no oh okay and then she goes on to list all these i i fear this and i fear that has that ever happened to you oh well no and um she's listing all of these things and then bob newhart says all right here's my professional opinion um i'm going to say two words to you and i want you to listen to them carefully i want you to take them out of my office i want you to put them in practice just two words stop it first word stop second word it s-t-o-p new word i-t and then she'd be like but what about this stop it but but what happened this happened stop it this is a negative example by the way a lot of times we can read scripture like that like paul is just saying don't be anxious just stop it stop it it's wrong with you come on and if somebody's ever counseled you and your anxiety in this way you can know how profoundly unhelpful it is you know the ang the antidote to anxiety is not telling people just simply don't be anxious it's what paul does right after this it's the peace of god right paul just doesn't just say rejoice he says rejoice in the lord not just muster up joy it's in the lord that you're supposed to find joy you know detached from the reality of the gospel the word peace it's like this spiritual marshmallow it sounds so sweet but there's nothing to it it's not going to actually do anything for you no substance to it but the god of peace is the one who fights for his people he's not going to abandon them and his promise to restore all things is true the promise in life is not that the hard stuff is going to go away but verse nine the god of peace will be with you why does this passage exist not just because you struggle with anxiety we can read it just as a stop it it is an invitation to a different way to lean into the world one that doesn't just say these problems aren't real but that invites a different truth into it where you inspect it where you talk about it and it actually has something to say even for our greatest fears there's this um elderly woman at a church in

st louis her name was barb and if ever i would say something that i was struggling with like my kids are just you know so hard and you know this one's not listening and doing this or that or this is going on or you know she had a fever and i'm just so stressed by it she'd always come up to me and she would say she'd take my hand and she'd pat it and she'd go this too shall pass and it would drive me nuts like validate my struggle barb and she passed away a few years ago and i thought about that phrase a lot and it started to dawn on me the wisdom that she was speaking from because she wasn't trying to say this isn't a problem but it was a person who'd lived many years and experienced real loss and hardship and surprises but she had pressed into and she had clung to the peace of god and it was as she kept grabbing my hands and i would feel her hands and there you know the the skin was thin and you could see the the veins and the bones because she was so frail the beauty of a person who understood the fleetingness of our struggle and clung to a hope that that would someday be dealt with see it's not just her hands there's other hands that speak to us nail marked hands in the garden what's going on jesus is pleading with the father there's any way let this cup pass from me and the gospel of luke it said his sweat is like great drops of blood the anxiety and horror of the cross to come but he says not my will be done but yours father and there's this beauty and truth and what jesus has gone through and faced is harder than anything i ever will and his death and resurrection have secured my life and i get to receive this good news by grace and so there is nothing there's no performance there's not this quota and anxiety in my life that that if i go above that i don't get to come into the kingdom of god but rather his grace comes and pursues me and brings me in and if his grace that brings me in it's his grace that keeps me there if i didn't earn my way in i'm not going to unearn my way out and that y'all that starts to bring a peace and starts to speak a word to our anxiety that we have a savior like that the one who can sympathize with us in our weakness but one without sin who's perfectly lived in my place so every time i feel like i'm too much of a big problem for god i get reminded and argued with by the gospel by the cross of jesus that my problems are precisely why he came he came to rescue me from that he came to do something about that and he invites me not to be anxious but instead to remember he's at hand he's there he's with us and his peace is offered to me it's such good news and it takes a lifetime to learn y'all and we need to help each other in this so let's pray right now that god would just do just that father we thank you um for that those for those in christ in your son our fears and anxieties do not have the final word even if they rattle around in our minds even now the truth is they will give way to resurrection hope thank you jesus for facing our ultimate fears in our place so that we with quivering voices can actually denounce fear and cling to you father we plead with you that by your spirit to make

[ 40 : 31 ] us here on crow road a people of prayer a people of joy a people who lean into life together a people who name hard realities a people who find rest from their worry because we cling to and we believe the gospel that it really is good news for anxious people we pray all of this in the name of our suffering amen