

Don't worry...Pray!

Philippians 4:4~9

We live in frightening times. Besides all the normal fears about our future, our employment, our health, and our children, there are the added fears of terrorism in this post 9/11 world in which we live. Worrying is different. It's not only a highly unproductive activity, it is also a faithless activity that has no part in the life of a believer.

Some of our problems are constant, day-to-day challenges. Others come and go. When you get up in the morning, you'll have your daily allotment of heartaches, adversities, disappointments, difficulties... and a sprinkling of potential impossibilities.

Many of the people in hospital beds today in North America are constant worriers. Forty-three percent of all adults suffer health effects due to worry and stress. We're told that 79 to 90 percent of all visits to primary care physicians are stress-related complaints or disorders.

We are a culture in the unrelenting grip of anxiety and worry. You could write on countless North American gravestones the epitaph "Hurried, Worried, Buried."

Dr. Walter Caver reported a survey on worry that indicated only 8 percent of the things people worried about were legitimate matters of concern. The other 92 percent were imaginary, involving either matters that almost no possibility of happening, or things over which a person had no control anyway.

Then there are people who always seem so worried about what others think of them. It's been said that you wouldn't worry so much about what people think about you...if you knew how seldom they do!

God gives us some practical information in Philippians 4 that tells us what we should do instead of worrying. It gives us principles that, if applied, would help us banish worry from our thoughts.

Where was Paul when he wrote these words? That's a significant question. If we learn that Paul was kicked back in a lawn chair in the sunshine on the island of Crete, sipping an iced tea, we might say, "It's easy for him to tell us, 'Don't worry,' because he's living the good life."

But the fact is, when Paul wrote these words he was in dire straits.

It had been Paul's desire for years to take the gospel to Rome. God certainly fulfilled his dream, but the apostle probably had no idea that he would arrive in Rome in chains, as a prisoner. Locked up, he awaited an unknown fate.

It was a pathetic, miserable situation he found himself in. Yet at this very time and

in this very place, he is able to say, *"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"* Paul faced uncertainty-about his very life. Paul - who by all logic ought to have been worried - wasn't worried.

In spite of whatever you may be wrestling with right now, remember that God is still on the throne. He still loves you. His plans for you are still good. He will never leave you or forsake you. Let's consider practical steps Paul gives us for banishing worry from our lives.

In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

The next time you feel an inclination to worry, quickly switch mental gears and pray instead. We need to form the habit of turning to God when we feel worry approaching. Your reaction in times of trouble should be like a conditioned reflex.

Our body experiences both normal and conditioned reflexes. A normal reflex isn't taught; it's automatic. If I reach out and touch a hot iron, I pull my hand back. I didn't have to teach myself to do that. I automatically pull away from something that causes pain. Even a small baby would pull his hand away from something hot.

It reminds me of a story of the guy who went to a doctor with two severely burned ears. "This is horrible," the doctor said. "How did you burn both of your ears?"

The man said, "I was doing some ironing. The phone rang. I got a little confused and I answered the iron instead of the phone."

The doctor winced. "That's awful," he said, "But how did you burn the other ear?"

"He called back."

It's an automatic reflex for (most) people to pull away something that would burn them. But at the same time, our behaviour and responses are also governed by conditioned reflexes.

So what's the solution? When your knees start knocking, kneel on them! Don't worry. Pray. That's what the Bible teaches.

Paul is talking about more than just bombarding heaven with our requests. The text says, *"In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving."*

Don't miss this. Thanksgiving is a vital component of prayer even before it's answered-especially before it's answered. I am taking time to worship my heavenly Father and remind myself of His greatness and power, and in so doing I automatically put my own problems into their proper perspective.

As I contemplate the awesomeness and magnificence of God, I see my own life situations in corresponding smallness.

This is why the Lord taught us to pray, *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread."* (Matthew 6:9~11)

If I had written the Lord's Prayer, it probably would sound more like this: "Our Father in heaven, give us this day our daily bread." You know...just cut to the chase. Here's what I need, God.

But Jesus taught us that before we offer a word of personal petition, we need to utter thoughts like these: "Father, You are in heaven. You are mighty. You are beautiful. You deserve to be revered and worshiped and adored. Father, I just want to do that for a few moments.

Before I bring a single request before You, before I talk to You about my own needs and concerns, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth just like it is up there in heaven. Lord, if what I'm about to pray is outside of Your will, overrule it. I know that You know what's right and best for me." Praying in that way tends to put everything into perspective.

Have you prayed about your problems? That thing that is troubling you right now, that worry that has been tormenting you? You've been down and depressed and discouraged over it. You've been driven to fits of anxiety and heart-pounding bouts of stress. But have you prayed about it?

...let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6~7)

You might say, "Lord, take this problem away."

He might, and He might not. But know this. No matter what, He will give you peace as you ride out your personal storm. We need to trust in the plan and providence of God.

The phrase Paul uses here is a military term. He's saying that God's peace will mount a garrison or literally stand guard around your heart and protect you, if you will present your requests to Him.

We need to remember to cast our cares upon the Lord. So many of us drag our cares around all day, gathering more and more of them as the day wears on. Is it any wonder we feel so weary in our soul? Maintaining personal peace involves both the heart and the mind.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy- meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

What we think about ultimately affects what we do. For this reason, we must nip in the bud any thoughts that would be impure, spiritually harmful, or would feed the beast of worry. Train your mind to think biblically.

The next time you find yourself troubled by some issue in your life, talk to yourself a little! What I mean by this is we need to train our minds to think biblically, and rein in our emotions accordingly. Faith does not work automatically. You have to apply it.

Every believer needs to do this. I don't care how many years you've known the Lord. Anyone can experience a lapse of faith-a moment of black despair - when pain intrudes or darkness falls. You can endure a period of life where you feel disoriented and confused.

Having faith, however, means you refuse to stress out about your life. You reject the inclination to hold on to dark thoughts about the future.

The most right-thinking person on earth today is the biblically literate Christian who looks at life in a logical, clearheaded manner through the lens of God's eternal Word.

The things which you learned and received and saw in me, these do and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9)

You can't separate outward action and inward attitude. The way you think is the way you will live. If you're engaged in right praying and right thinking, it follows that you will be engaged in right living, as a matter of course.

Even in the midst of turmoil and craziness the Christian can have the peace that passes all human understanding. I have seen it. I have talked with believers who are terminally ill or facing the most adverse of circumstances, and I have seen that peace in action.

I have seen how God can intervene. Only Christ can give that. The world can't give it. Only God can. And if you ask Him, He will.

Amen.

**Message preached at the Knox/Grace combined Thanksgiving worship by
the Reverend Jonathan Cho, pastor of Victoria Grace Korean Church.**