



**WORRY about NOTHING
PRAY about EVERYTHING**

Pastor Jeff Wood

First Presbyterian, Sebastian

Oct. 9, 2016

A young man with his own newspaper asked an older man reading a paper on a park bench, “Would you give me the time, please?” The older man said, “No.” This surprised the young man, so he asked, “Excuse me, but have I offended you in some way?” “No,” came the reply. “But you seem like a nice dressed young man who, judging by your paper, is interested in world events, and these, I’m afraid, would make me open to having a conversation with you. If I had a conversation with you, I’m afraid I would like you and if I liked you, I am afraid I would invite you home for dinner, and if I invited you home for dinner, I’m afraid you’d meet my daughter, and if you met my daughter, I’m afraid you two would fall in love and get married, and I don’t want my daughter to marry a guy who doesn’t own a watch. So I’m not going to give you the time.”

Like the man with the daughter, we are afraid about a lot of things, aren’t we? Let’s go ahead and name some of the worries, fears, and anxieties people nowadays

...anxieties steal from life. But not only that, they steal from God, from his glory.

face: cancer, cholesterol, not attractive enough, too little money, violence, milkshakes not made with real ice cream, and hearing about how bad

worry is, we can even worry about worry! We worry about a lot of things and all of them, like the draw on an electrical system that makes the lights in the rest of the house go dim, take a little of our personality’s energy.

While life has its ups and downs, God intends for us to grow and be strong in him and not be debilitated by worry.

In our study of Philippians, we come today to chapter 4:1-9, the last in our series for now on the letter, and here Paul gives us, in three little verses, a prescription *for worries*. We pray.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit then, these words: Philip. 4:1-9 --

Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that/this is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

[2] I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. [3] Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

[4] Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! [5] Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. [6] Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. [7] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[8] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. [9] Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth, and from his fullness have we all received grace upon grace.

Anxiety takes many forms and many of them are sinful forms. Worry about money can lead to stealing, coveting, and hoarding. Worry about success can make you irritable and abrupt. Worry about what others will think of you can make you withdrawn or make you lie about things. Worry about power can make you quarrelsome, perhaps like with Euodia and Syntche in our passage this morning. So if, so if ... anxiety can be dealt with, many other downriver sins would also be dealt with.

For all its variety of forms, the Bible tells us that anxiety has one root cause and bids us not to treat the symptoms, but the cause. Others may disagree, but the Bible is consistent and says that the root, the cause of anxiety, is the two-sided coin of unbelief and pride.

I love Genesis 1 because it not only tells us the beginning of all things, but it tells us what is behind all things. In the Garden of Eden, Eve both believed in her judgment more than God's (that was pride) and did not believe God's goodness and wisdom about the tree (unbelief). Confidence in herself went up and confidence in God went down. Pride toward self and unbelief toward God. Both are turns away from God, both have us determining what will be satisfying and what needs to be done. She voted for herself rather than for God. That's what is behind it all.

Jesus, in The Sermon on the Mount, tells us about what's behind things. It is three chapters long and the middle chapter, chapter six, using almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, Jesus attacks doing these three things in a way that is about us – you, look at me; me, look at me! Pride. Then Jesus in nine verses brings up worry four times and

addresses them with a bunch of promises about God. Why do you worry (have anxiety) about food, drink, clothes, and the length of your life? God not only *can* take care of that, but *does* takes care of that. Believe. The prescription there in the Sermon on the Mount is the prescription here in Philippians 4: Dismantle pride (look at me) and believe God (he takes care of birds and flowers, etcetera) ... or, putting it in other words, don't boast in yourself, but rejoice in the Lord.

Here are a couple stories. Remember the one about Joseph? He was sold by his brothers into slavery. That will give you anxiety. 'Where is God? I better solve this because he doesn't seem to be doing it. God out, me in.'

He ends up in Potiphar's house managing this upper class guy's estate. Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him and he is unjustly thrown in prison. Where's God again? 'Why is this happening?' Etcetera.

But in that prison, Joseph meets members of Pharaoh's court and ends up in service there because Pharaoh needs help interpreting dreams. His successful interpretation of those dreams leads to him becoming second in command of the Egyptian empire.

Because of his position when a terrible famine comes, Joseph has had foresight such as to food reserves. This means that when his, the covenant family meant to bless the earth, might face extinction from famine, they find food and haven in Egypt. And in the process, he does bless the earth, saving Egyptians, too, from famine.

Joseph looks at all these turns and says what was meant for evil, God choreographed for good. And we, with him, do the same. Don't we? We say, "Wow," about God.

Story number two. Richard Wurmbrand tells a story that observes Moses meditating by a well. A traveler stops by the well for a drink and travels on.

Unbeknownst to him, he had dropped his purse full of money in the sand by the well. Another traveler comes to the well, found the purse, and went on his way rejoicing. Later, a third traveler comes to the well, takes a drink, and as it is late, falls asleep there. The first man discovering his purse missing, returns to the well. He wakes the man asleep and demands it back from him. In the argument that followed, the first man killed the last. Moses declares, “God, people do not believe in you because there is too much evil in the world. Why should the first man have lost his purse and become a murderer? Why should the second have gotten money without having worked for it? Why was the innocent third man slain?” God replies, “I cannot always explain these things for you but here I will. The first man was a thief’s son. The purse contained money stolen by his father from the father of the second man, who finding the purse, found what was his due. The third was a murderer whose crime was never found out and so he received justice. My wisdom and justice is at work in the world even if you do not understand it.” There’s a “Wow” in this story too. Don’t you agree? Money restored. Something never found out punished.

This story is a little odd, but in it we see something of the mystery of God’s way and we say, “Wow,” again.

Here’s a third story. China fell to the communists and missionaries fled. There was anguish over losing all the work already done there and all the work waiting to be done there.

Communism, however, did two things rather directly. One, they gave the millions of laborers work and the work was building roads. Two, they took the many, many languages of China, all very difficult to manage, and created a simple language for everyone. Both were attempts to unite the country – by roads, by language.

These two things, interestingly, allowed Chinese Christians new access to the interior and new ability to communicate. Instead of lengthy travels on footpaths, faster roads. Instead of dozens of languages to learn and put the Bible in, now one that worked all around. So the church grew!

Ahh, but then communism shut the churches to stop that. The Christians, however, just went into intensive churches known as house churches and they flourished.

Then communism took the Bibles to stop that. But the Christians started copying the remaining Bibles by hand. That's a powerful course in Bible study! And the church grew.

Then communism put the pastors in prison to stop that. But that meant new leaders emerged and that the pastors, in solitary confinement, became people of deep prayer. And the church grew.

So when China was once again opened to the world, there were Christians, Christians, Christians. Was God working something out in all that history? Another "wow" is coming to our lips.

I've given a story of the Bible, of myth, of recent history, and now one of my own life. Kristin became a colleague just a few weeks after her husband died of cancer. She came to our church with her two children. Of course, my heart went out to her and we became good friends. What a strange positioning of her life and mine because as the healing became strong in her, my wife got cancer. Kristin was there knowing what it was like, comforting us. The way God cared for her spoke to my wife then that God would care for me and the boys. A mysterious movement of the hand of God. That's been present in all these stories and as we sense that, we say, "O God." We say, "Wow."

As you have been experiencing a “wow,” you have been rejoicing in the Lord. Saying, “Wow!” is another way of rejoicing in the Lord. It is another way of magnifying the Lord. It is another way of exalting his name together. It is another way of “boasting in the Lord.”

What we have just done is to focus on God and his power through a few stories. When you were hearing the stories *and believing* them, you were letting go of self and embracing God. You were rejoicing in the Lord. Paul commands, “Rejoice in the Lord.” It is an imperative verb. And now you know one way how to. You remember what the great and small things God has done. The psalmist says, “Thy word have I hid in my heart.” That includes the stories of God’s ways. We remember the Bible stories so that we vote for God, and not instead for ourselves.

The prescription for anxiety is to attack it at its root and get our eyes off ourselves and on to God. We have actually done this by listening to stories of God and his care.

Speaking of care, there is a similar verse to the ones we are looking at, and it is in 1 Peter 5. He says, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares for you.” Vote not for yourselves (humble), but vote for God (mighty hand). And the way the phrasing actually works is, “Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, *casting* all your anxieties on him, for he cares for you.” We humble by casting. And similarly, we can rejoice in the Lord *by* a) letting our gentleness be known and b) *by* praying with thanksgiving.

Letting our gentleness be known. Gentleness is a full-bodied word meaning sweet reasonableness. I think of basketball. Because I’m not so good at it, when I play I throw myself about the court. I flail. I try to make up

for my lack of skill by extra energy. I'll demand everything that even resembles a foul. Etcetera. But a great player like our youth pastor, Jason, is measured. He's gentle, in a sense. He has a sweet reasonableness to his bearing.

When we have a great player on the court that we can pass to, when it isn't all up to us, when we rely on him... we can be more measured on the court of life. Do we trust God? That he is near? That he can work his will? When we are measured on the court of life, we are saying, "Yes, I think God can!" That's rejoicing in him.

And the passes we make on the court, are they not prayers? Are they not to the great player, God? I'm not voting for me to handle this and this and this.

So, how do we deal with anxiety? We fight the good fight of faith. It is a fight. It is a good fight. It is a fight to trust God and believe he is good. We rejoice in the Lord. We let gentleness be our way. We pray.

Remember that man in the park that I began with? The one who wouldn't tell the young man the time? We say to him, "Trust in the Lord. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him. He shall bring what you need to pass." (Psalm 27:3-4). We say to him, "Worry about nothing by praying about everything." We say, "Don't look at God through your problems, but look at your problems through God." We say, "Worry about nothing by praying about everything."

If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.

revjeffwood@gmail.com

www.welovefirst.org

www.facebook.com/welovefirstsebastian