

Truths that Transform Series  
**Don't Worry : PRAY!**

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* Philippians 4:6

We're in a series called "Truths that Transform," and we have a very important truth to talk about this morning. So I want to start by clarifying who this message is for. I'd like to ask you a question so you know if this message is for you. I'd like to ask you to think about the major categories of your life — your job, your health, your physical appearance, your relationships, your finances.

I'd like to ask you this question: How many of you have at least one problem, would you raise your hand? Well, then this message is for you. That's good news.

Now the truth that we're going to discuss today is one of the most crippling forces to attack human beings - and that's worry. Think about it.

- Worry has the power to rob you of joy.
- Worry makes me obsess about myself which keeps me from loving other people.
- Worry keeps me from taking risks, from going on the adventures that I really want to go on and from daring to do what God made me to do.
- Worry can erode your trust in God. It can eat away at your faith.

And Paul makes this extraordinary statement in our Bible text, "Don't worry." Part of what is remarkable about what Paul says is he doesn't simply say don't worry about the small stuff like gaining five pounds over the holidays or finding another gray hair or something. Paul says, "Do not be anxious about anything" — when you get fired; when you go bankrupt; when you're divorced; when you lose your health — Paul says, "**Don't be anxious about anything.**"

Now, how is such a life possible? Well, that's what I want to address.

The first question is this: Who wrestles with worry? The second question is: Where does worry come from? How does it originate? The third question is: What is Paul's alternative? What is the anecdote? Three questions, so let's dive into the first one.

Let's start by asking you **Who Wrestles With Worry?** And my quick answer to that one would be everybody. Everybody has worry problems. But some people don't recognize them because we have different styles for dealing with worry.

**Some People Face Problems And Wrestle Openly With Worry.** Some of you are very aware of your problems with worry because it's right on the surface.

**Some People Deny Problems, And Don't Worry Much.** Some of you are worriers and you know you're a worrier. You worry about how much you worry. But some of you don't recognize your problems with worry because some people go into denial.

**Some People Face Problems And Become Self-Reliant.** Some of you go into heavy self-reliance mode. You decide that whenever a problem comes along, you will deal with it all by yourself, without help from God or anybody. You're into control. And you decide you're going to manage every detail and dominate any person that might cause you anxiety, directly or indirectly, so that you're always in control by the strength of your will.

There's a story told of a family who's little girl was going to school for the first time – she was off to kindergarten. The family got her a backpack and talked to her about how wonderful school would be – she'd learn and meet new friends. On the first day of school, the little girl went into her classroom with confidence – there were no tears. But when she got home that afternoon, the little girl flew into a fit of rage. "I'm never going back to school" she announced. "Why not, honey?" her parents asked. "Because from the time I got there until I left, that teacher didn't do one thing I told her to!" (She sounds like a pretty strong-willed, controlling child.)

Some of you, when a problem comes your way, you go into heavy control mode. And sooner or later, you're going to have to

face the fact that **ultimately** you are NOT in control. You may be able to dictate outcomes at work or at home, but the day is coming, friends, when something is going to hit you, and as smart or as strong as you may be, you will realize you are not really in control at all.

**WORRY IS SINFUL.** Jesus said, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Luke 12:34 This means that when you worry over work, or money, or relationships, then you show that THOSE are your treasure, -- NOT GOD! Your heart is set on THOSE things, not on GOD. **Worry indicates a heart that has turned from God and doubts God.** And that’s sin. It’s sinful because it is not trusting God.

Next let’s ask, **Where Does Worry Come From?**

**Worry Comes From Perceiving Problems.** Now this is an interesting question to me because I think there’s a real common illusion. The illusion is that "the reason I worry is because I have these certain problems. And if I just didn’t have these problems, if these problems would just go away, I wouldn’t worry anymore." That’s the illusion.

Now the good news is your problems ARE going to go away. They are. The bad news has to do with WHEN that will happen. On what day will your problems go away? On the day you die. On the day you die you’ll be amazed at how your life just gets smoothed over and troubles just don’t bother you very much.

But in this life, Jesus said one time, "Every day has troubles enough for that day." And it’s a strange thing in this life — problems come and problems go. That’s part of living in a fallen, sin-filled world.

**Worry Comes From A Feeling Of Diminished Power.** An expert in this field by the name of Edward Hallowell says that worry results primarily from two things. One is a heightened sense of vulnerability, feeling real vulnerable. The second one is a diminished sense of power, feeling relatively weak, feeling like I can’t handle what I’m facing. Anytime there is a heightened sense

that I'm vulnerable right now, and a diminished sense that I can handle it, a diminished sense of strength, the result is worry.

And whatever the issue is, whether it's health, money, relationships, marriage, whatever, you'll find that where there's an increased sense of vulnerability, and a diminishing sense of your ability to handle it, you'll experience a growing sense of anxiety.

This past week I was standing in my driveway when I saw a young strong man running past my house. He was on the sidewalk and running fast. One hand was holding onto the back of a bicycle seat. He was obviously teaching his young daughter to ride a two wheel bike.

Children need practice when they are learning to ride a bike. Kids can be so afraid of crashing and skinning a knee. But when someone strong is running along beside them, with a strong hand on the bike seat, keeping the little child from falling, then they are no longer afraid. They have a big strong parent at their side.

Now Paul is in this amazing situation, sitting in a prison. Maybe he's going to rot there. Maybe he's going to get executed the next day. There are people outside trying to trash his reputation. He sits there and writes to people on the outside, "Don't be anxious about anything." How does he do that? Well, he's convinced that there's somebody real big sitting in that prison cell with him.

He's convinced that he's not alone, and he's not really very vulnerable about what matters. Because Paul says what matters most to you and to me and to him is to live in the care and love of God. And Paul says nothing can threaten that.

Friends, see, **Because Of Jesus You Are Not Vulnerable To Guilt, Temptation, Hatred, Or Despair.** Jesus has overcome sin, death, devil, hell. <sup>31</sup>*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?* <sup>32</sup>*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ...* <sup>38</sup>*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,<sup>[13]</sup> neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all*

***creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** Romans 8:31-32, 38-39

Paul says in one place in the letter he wrote to the church at Rome, "What can separate me from the love of God?" Then he lists the kinds of things that we worry about a lot: danger, poverty, violence, death itself. He says, "No, I'm convinced nothing can separate me from the love of God. So, that's not at stake. That's not at risk. My living in the care and love of God is not at risk. I am not ultimately vulnerable to anything, not to death itself."

And for you too, Jesus lived, died, rose again for you. He's already defeated the greatest powers that you're vulnerable to. He offers you His victory, as a gift. Jesus just loves you and wants to come stand with you.

**Because Of God The Father's Daily Care You Are Not Vulnerable To Physical Need.** God the Father supplies all that is needed for this life. *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ... Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ... If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!"* Luke 12:22b, 24,25,28

God doesn't promise riches, or that your life will be problem free, but He promises His care. "And therefore," God says, and this is an amazing thing, "you have no reason ever to be anxious." Look at the birds in the air. Look at the lilies of the field. They don't toil or spin. But they live in the hand of God and so do you. You have no reason ever to be anxious."

**Because Of God The Holy Spirit's Indwelling, You Are Not Vulnerable To Being Completely Without Strength And Hope.** When you trust Jesus as your forgiver and leader, God loves you so much that He moves in – right into you. The Holy Spirit keeps you in faith (you don't need to worry about that!). And

the Holy Spirit gives prays for you, and gives you strength and hope.

That really is the message of the gospel -- Jesus Christ comes to you to be your friend and the Lord and the Savior of your life. You have no reason ever to be anxious. You live in the hand of God, whatever it is you face.

### **What Is The Alternative To Worry?**

Paul talks about a connection between worry and prayer. What he is saying is, "Don't worry, pray." That's the truth for this week: don't worry, pray.

The best way to learn to worry about nothing is to pray about everything. Now, praying doesn't mean that you never feel worried. The idea is this: Anytime you feel a twinge of anxiety or concern or worry, God wants you to take it directly to him. Tell Him all about it. And your job is not to make the anxious feelings go away. Maybe they'll go away. Maybe they won't. You can't control that, so don't beat yourself up trying to. Your job, when you have a worry, is to take it directly to God. And you can do that.

**Trust And Pray In Everything.** God guided Paul to write: *"Don't be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and petition, make your requests be known to God."* Philippians 4:6

It's that little phrase "in everything," that doesn't leave anything out. *"In everything make your requests known to God."* The implications of that single phrase are enormous.

Children come to parents with all kinds of requests. Some requests are wonderful and some are foolish and some are self-centered. But what matters to the parent is that the child comes, and comes with what's really on the child's heart. Not that the child would try to fake it and sound real altruistic and noble, but that the child just comes in the reality of what's on the child's heart and lays that before the parent.

So you, don't filter your requests. Pray to God honestly, openly about the concerns and anxieties that are *really* going on in your life. Pray to God like a child asks a loving and caring parent --

not about what you think ought to be in you, but about what really is in you, about the desires of your heart. Become an "in everything" pray-er.

**TAKE ACTION** Sometimes human beings will spend days, weeks, months or years, and they will spend more energy and time and emotion worrying about something then they'll spend taking positive steps that will help to prevent the very thing that they're worried about. We'll spend 10 or 20 or 100 times more energy worrying about something than we will taking steps towards resolution.

Maybe you're concerned about your finances and you're real worried about them, but you've never done anything about that. You've never sat down to try to figure out how to make a budget. And maybe what will happen as you pray about that is you'll get a sense from God, "I want you to visit a Christian Financial Counselor so you can take action steps."

Maybe you're real concerned about your marriage, and as you pray about it God will say, "I want you to do something positive." Maybe it's, "I want you to find the name of a really good Christian counselor that you or the two of you can go to together so that you can get on the solution side."

Very often, as you pray about concerns, what will happen is God will prompt you to take action steps, and it is crucially important at this point that you are willing to listen and say "yes" and respond in faith. Because if your idea of prayer is that it's just kind of a magic thing where all I have to do is say these words before God, and it makes anxiety go away without my having to do anything or be obedient or trust, then you have the wrong idea of prayer. Prayer is connected to a life of faith and a willing heart.

**Be Transformed In God's Peace.** Now if you're willing to do this, friends, if you're willing to do what Paul says: "Don't worry, pray; pray in everything," whatever your concern — big, small, wise, foolish, selfish — just place it before God. And then listen to God and respond in faith and obedience. If you're willing to do that, Paul makes a tremendous promise. He goes on to say in the very next

sentence, "And the peace of God" — listen to this — "And the peace of God . . ." Would you like that?

***"And the peace of God which transcends human understanding"*** — which is deeper than any human being can understand — ***"will guard your heart and mind."*** Philippians 4:6

God is not a God of worry. And God never sends worry. God wants for His peace — the kind of peace that characterizes God — that very peace to guard your heart and mind.

That peace of God can be yours when you ... **Take The Weight Of Your Burdens Off.** There's an old story about a woman who was department store shopping all day. And she's got all these boxes and bags she's carrying and by the end of the day, she's just looking really exhausted. She goes into an elevator. And she's struggling to hold all of her stuff. When a little old lady in the elevator says, "You can set your packages down. The elevator is strong enough to carry them up to the next floor for you."

What must it look like to God to see all these people carrying around these burdens that are way too big for them? God's just saying, "Why don't you take it off? Why don't you set it down?" God says, "I am strong enough to carry it for you."

I sometimes think some of the most wonderful words Jesus ever said was when he said, ***"Come to me all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*** Matthew 11:25 Won't you give him your burdens? You really can do that.

You can do it right now, and then when the anxiety comes back, you do it again. And then when it comes back, you do it again. This is between you and God — what is the burden that you're carrying today? Maybe it's anxiety over your family or children or marriage or a relationship that is not there that you're worried about. Maybe you're worried about finances. Maybe it's your job.

You can decide right now, "All right, God, I'm not going to carry this burden around anymore. I have a new strategy now. I'm just



going to pray. I'm going to set it at your feet." Do that right now, would you? Just set it at God's feet.

Then one more thing: maybe God has something he wants you to do. Maybe there's a step of courage and faith that God wants you to take. So will you just listen and identify if there is something that you need to do to address this concern or this worry? And will you say yes?

AMEN.