

**WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?
Our Beloved Enemy
Philippians 4:1-7**

One night several years ago, I woke up at midnight with a horrendous pain in my stomach and my side, and I was convinced that the end had come far too early for me. I began to formulate just how I would go. It was a painful death, and I died it several times before I made it to the doctor's office to find out that I had a kidney stone. I did not die, but I did wish for it at a couple of points. God spared me. I faced this again recently before my trip to Africa. God blessed me with a miracle by making my pain go away completely within the first day of my travel, even though I never saw the stone. But my troubles were not over. When I got home, I had another near-death experience. I lay in my bed late at night (once again) and began to fear that my kidneys were shutting down. I imagined what was happening inside of my body, and it was not pretty. I imagined that I would have painful surgeries and huge doctor bills, and that I would end with a grieving family by my side. My wife sensed that I was not sleeping, and she reminded me that tossing and turning in my bed in fear was not going to make me feel better. She lovingly told me to drink some water and then QUIT WHINING to myself about my fears. I love my wife. I am so glad that I did not die beside her that night, making her feel horribly guilty about how she had counseled me (even though she was absolutely right)!

OK, I have a problem. So do you. The problem is not a personality issue or a minor quirk of character; it is actually a SIN. What's worse, this is a sin that most of us PRACTICE and PROTECT in our inmost being. In fact, it is one of our most beloved ENEMIES. It is an ADDICTION that damages us every bit as much as alcohol or drugs, but this addiction is socially acceptable. Almost everyone is guilty of it because we all think that it is the only way to deal with difficulties. This problem is POISON, yet we drink it like MEDICINE thinking that it will cure us of our troubles. We feel that it is helping us make it through the tough times in our lives, but it is actually helping to CREATE many more problems than it solves. You know this problem well: WORRY. At the very center of the passage that we want to look at today, here is what Paul commands us about worry: **Philippians 4:6a NLT**

Don't worry about anything.

Aren't you glad that he settled that for us? He sounds Jamaican! "Don't worry. Be happy!" Well, maybe it is not as simple as he makes it sound. Or, maybe it is; just not like a Rastafarian would lead you to believe! Scripture is not a fan of denial and dope; the Bible deals in FAITH and HOPE! Jesus was the one who said it first. Listen to his wise instructions in the Sermon on the Mount: **Matthew 6:25-27 NIV**

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? **26** Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or

store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? **27** Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

Have you ever considered what your worry is costing you in your everyday life? Think about it. Worry is a THIEF that accomplishes nothing and takes everything! It neutralizes your faith, and then steals your joy and your peace and your sense of contentment. We will see that Paul nails every one of those facts in this last chapter of Philippians. Even the word “worry” is a dead giveaway of its destructive nature. The word **worry** in Old English meant **“to kill something by strangulation!”** Wow! Worry strangles the life out of you. It is a fact that worry is the number one mental health issue in the U.S. because of the enormous STRESS that it causes in our lives. It can literally kill you physically. Solomon said this about worry: **Ecclesiastes 11:10a NLT**

So refuse to worry, and keep your body healthy.

It is really ironic. We worry about our health all of the time, and our worry is a prime reason why we stay sick and tired all of the time. Worry makes a body weak and vulnerable. **One medical report I read said, “Worry causes more stress on the heart than any other single stimulus, including physical exercise and fatigue!”** Not only that, worry strangles your spiritual life as well. Jesus said this about the power of worry: **Matthew 13:22 NIV**

22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

It is a tragic truth that worry is a sin that can CHOKe OUT the Word in our lives. It has the power to smother our faith in God! There is a very practical reason for this.

Worry is a focus problem.

Last week we learned that knowing Christ and experiencing his resurrection power is accomplished by choosing to maintain the proper focus in our walk. Worry - in absolute defiance of that principle - is the deliberate CHOICE to mentally obsess over those things that you feel are a potential threat to your happiness and well being. It is NOT a focus on God. In fact, it is an improper, unhealthy focus on what God is NOT doing in your life. As a noun, the dictionary defines worry as **“a negative state of mind concerning POTENTIAL future circumstances.”** Worry is literally FAITHLESSNESS in TRAINING. It steals your joy from today and your hope from tomorrow! It is the act of rehearsing the potential FAILURE OF GOD as a fact in your mind; even though God NEVER fails! It is the assumption that God will forget you, forsake you, or fail you in some crucial area of life. As a verb, the dictionary defines worry as **“To destroy one’s peace of mind by repeated or consistent**

tormenting attacks.” Does that sound harmless to you? Worry is a relentless assault on your peace of mind. But, I ask you, WHO is attacking your peace by worry? It is YOU! You are kicking your own tail. How foolish is that? The enemy loves it when he doesn’t have to lift a finger to whip us. Mental and spiritual self-strangulation is one of his favorite forms of human torture.

Jesus made it clear that worry is a betrayal of faith! It is an inward admission that God is unable to handle whatever problem or need that you are facing. **In fact, if you are currently living your life without regard for - or in defiance of - God’s will and wisdom, then you can COUNT on worry being your constant companion! This is why Jesus said that worry is what UNBELIEVERS do! Matthew 6:31-32 NLT**

31 “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ **32** These things DOMINATE the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.

For the same reason, Paul’s first counsel to the Philippians about worry is NOT about worry, but about their FAITH WALK. **Philippians 4:1 The Message**

My dear, dear friends! I love you so much. I do want the very best for you. You make me feel such joy, fill me with such pride. Don’t waver. Stay on track, steady in God.

Your primary focus in life must be on what God is saying to you and what he is calling you to do. Obey him and then trust him with the consequences. This is the life of faith. **But if you are still struggling with worry, then Paul gives us some amazing advice for how to deal with that as well.** That is what I want to spend the remainder of this message (and the next) focusing on for our good! So, let’s just say that you are a true follower of Christ and you are doing your best to honor God’s will and word in your life, but you are still plagued by worry. What are you to do? **Paul gives us 4 very powerful WEAPONS to help us fight worry. We will look at two of them today. They are practical and accessible to every one of us at any time we need them. We just have to CHOOSE to USE them.**

Our first weapon against worry is joyful praise.

We can see this weapon in **Philippians 4:4 NIV**

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

At first glance, this may seem like a very simplistic command for a very complicated set of problems. But look deeper. Rejoicing is an ACTION, not an EMOTION. **You can choose to rejoice even when you do not feel like it. The key is what you are rejoicing IN. In this case, Paul is instructing us to rejoice “in the LORD.”**

He is NEAR, and he is coming soon! This kind of rejoicing will “be evident to everyone” because it cannot help but affect our attitudes and our responses to those around us. This is the beauty of joyful praise. **It is the choice to rejoice in God even when you cannot be excited about your circumstances.** Do you know how to do this? If not, I want to give you a spiritual EXERCISE that you can practice whenever you are tempted to worry. Instead of obsessing over some problem or issue that you cannot control, start telling God why he is so precious to you. Recite for him all of the ways that he has been faithful to you, and all of the ways in which he has served as your provider, protector, lover, healer, friend, guide, and hope. **If you run out of words, then just run to the PSALMS and let those godly passages wash your minds with their rivers of joyful praise. I have done this since I was a teenager, and it has served me well. The Psalms express every human emotion that can be had, and then helps to lead those emotions to the right place. Many of them begin with anger or depression, but they all wind up with worship and praise! Let them lead you.**

In the night when you are tossing and turning on your bed, get up and read the Psalms and then recite them to the Lord as an act of praise. In tandem with that, keep praise music “at the ready” near your bedside when you are most tempted to worry. Combat worry with internal and external praise. DO IT! Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS. This means AT ALL TIMES and IN ALL SITUATIONS. God is always worthy of our praise. You will find JOY when you choose to REJOICE in God! Then, you will be able to LAUGH no matter what you are facing. And scripture teaches that **“Laughter is a medicine!”** I think that JOY is one of the missing ingredients in so many of our lives, but we are the ones who have the most reason to laugh and dance. Why are you so glum? God is the SOURCE of joy, so get with HIM and get with IT!

There is a second weapon that we can use to combat worry in our lives.

Our second weapon against worry is specific prayer.

I only showed you the very first part of this verse when we looked at it earlier. Now, I want us to look at the entire passage so that you can see the wisdom of God in leading us to pray specifically about things rather than worry about everything. Let’s read this passage in the NASB version. **Philippians 4:6-7 NASB**

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

You will probably find that when you are worrying about things you THINK that you are praying about them. But you are not. The other night when I was lying in my bed freaking out over what might be happening to my body, I was not praying. I was just imagining various awful scenarios. I knew better, but I failed to pray. Just this

week, I was worrying about some issue at CHC, and then I realized that I was not really bringing that need to God. I quickly remedied that. I affirmed all of the ways that I have seen God already at work in that situation, and I asked him to give me wisdom, direction, and courage for what I needed to do. Then I thanked him for his faithfulness and for the fact that this is HIS CHURCH (not mine), and that he WILL do what is best for it according to his will. In that moment, I was living out the practical wisdom of Philippians 4:6-7. **You see, Paul uses 4 different words to express the idea of prayer.** The first word – PRAYER – refers to our deliberate APPROACH to God. The word “proseuche” (to make or offer prayer) refers to a specific act of meeting with God. It can even be used of the PLACE where we meet with God. It is a spiritual act that is separate from mere mental wanderings. You MEET with God in your mind and body. Praise sets the stage for this! So, acknowledge to God that you are coming to him with some very heavy stuff and that you NEED his divine help. That leads us to the second word that Paul uses, the word SUPPLICATION. This word means that you are pleading with God and imploring him for his aid in some specific matter. **This is the kind of prayer that Jacob prayed when he wrestled with God. It is a cry to Abba, your heavenly Daddy! This is not wrestling with your own fears and thoughts, but bringing specific needs before God with urgency and faith.**

This leads us to the third word that Paul uses, THANKSGIVING. He makes it clear that our requests are to be made from the context of a grateful heart. This is why praise and worship are so essential to prayer. It is the acknowledgment that God HAS been faithful, and that he WILL be faithful. It is his very nature. Your words of thanksgiving then need to be SPECIFIC. HOW has God been faithful to you? WHEN was he last faithful, and WHAT was the result. Celebrate these things and let them generate even greater faith in your heart than before. The result of this will be PEACE, JOY, and CONTENTMENT. This is why the prophet Isaiah said of God, **“You will keep him in PERFECT PEACE whose MIND is STAYED on you!”** God’s peace (which Jesus said was a gift that he leaves with us) will then literally post a guard around your heart and mind to protect you from outward assaults that the enemy launches against you. You do your part to stay in that place of faith, and God does the rest! That is a proper focus, and a glorious reward!

There are still two more weapons that we need to look at next week. But I want to ask you today, “Are you a worrier?” Are you regularly consumed by worries and fears? If you are, then I want to CHALLENGE you to begin practically using these two weapons that God has made available to us. Don’t DISMISS them as too simple or inadequate for your situations. Paul wrote these words from PRISON.

What’s YOUR problem?

Let’s pray.