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Series: New Year's
Message: Plenty of Reasons to Worry

Transcribed Message
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Philippians 4:6-7

Worry has been described by someone as a great American pastime. One guy said, "I'm not happy unless I'm worried about something." Well, the truth of the matter is worry is not a great American pastime. It's not limited to America. It is a universal problem. It's a universal issue. It is hardly something that we would want to desire or pursue. Far from being a source of happiness, it's a great joy-stealer in the lives of so many people.

For that reason, we're not surprised that we come to Philippians chapter 4, a book in which the apostle Paul wrote specifically to encourage people in this whole matter of joy. It is not surprising that when you come to the fourth chapter of this book that you find Paul diving in to this very practical and specific issue of worries. On this first Sunday of 2021, when there are no doubt plenty of reasons to worry about a whole host of things that we could easily list out, we're going to look at Philippians 4 verses 6 and 7. These are probably two of the most familiar verses certainly in the book of Philippians. They're certainly two of the more familiar in the whole of the New Testament and I suppose in some respect in all of Scripture.

This is what we want to see this morning. Whatever you're worried about, tell it to the Lord. He's fully capable of handling every concern that comes to mind. In the verses that I read just a moment ago, verses 1 through 7, there are what I would simply call life's 3Rs listed out in those verses. We're not going to look at all of these verses but we're just going to introduce them in this way. What Paul does is in giving us the 3Rs, he gives them to us in the form of commands. They are very simply to rejoice in the Lord. The first one is rejoice in the Lord. The second is relax in your relationships with others. The third one is rest in God's sovereign plan. To rest in God's sovereign plan obviously is the antidote in many respects for worry. It is to acknowledge that God is King, that He is Lord, that He is master, that He is over everything. I suppose it would

be fair to say as you look at those three things that if we were to step into those and live those out, we would be successful in the life that God has called us to live.

In addition to those commands, let me just make three comments about those particular things that he begins this fourth chapter with. In the commentary on these three would be first of all that they are incredibly practical. God's solutions to things that we encounter in our life are always practical. This is about as down-to-earth as you can get. This is where we live life. If it's fair to say that discouragement and worry is contagious, then I think we could also rightly say that to be an encourager, to be one who is joyful, is just as contagious and maybe even more so. What's more practical than learning to get along with each other? Whether that each other is right within your own family or marriage, whether it's where you work, whether it's who you live next door to, it doesn't get much more practical than learning to live the way God has called us to with each other.

The second thing I notice is that God's solutions are simple. God's solutions to some of life's problems are rather simple. Rejoice, relax, and rest. These are one-word statements that God gives to us that speaks into each of these areas of very practical concerns. Sometimes human solutions and human resolutions are complex and difficult. We can muddy the waters so often and God gives us some very simple, very straightforward things. I'm not saying it's easy, but we're saying there is a simplicity oftentimes to what God tells us that we need to do.

Then lastly, there is certainly power in these solutions. God's solutions are powerful. These three commands bring about, if we step into them and follow them and obey them, they bring about literally life change. These things change one's life as you obey and follow them. I think it's also the power of God that is at work within us and through us to bring these things about. So it can give us a totally different perspective in these three areas.

We're going to zero in this morning since there appears on the horizon and in just daily life plenty of reasons to worry. We're going to start off 2021 and push back against that and say here is what God would say to us this morning at the beginning of this new year about all of these things that might want to overwhelm us. I'm going to present it in terms of six words. I want to bring to you six words that literally can change your life.

The first come to us at the beginning of verse 6 when Paul simply says do not be anxious about anything. I want to suggest first of all the first three words – worry about nothing. Worry about nothing. You can mull that over in your mind for a moment. Just say to yourself right now. Worry about nothing. God's antidote for us is to worry about nothing.

Let's start off by just understanding what worry is. Let's define this idea of what it means to worry and begin by telling us what it's not. What it's not. When we think about what it means to not be anxious or to not worry, it's not God saying to us be apathetic, or complacent, or don't care, or be irresponsible. That's not the opposite. That's not what God's talking about here. It is not an encouragement to being inactive or to not plan or to withdraw. It certainly isn't an open door to a lazy spirit. That's not what we would want to conclude. This is how I would define worry. Worry is when we take responsibility for things that God never intended for us to take. Worry is taking responsibility for things God never intended for me to take and making God's responsibilities my responsibilities. God would say to us there are things that very clearly He has told us that He alone is going to give attention to and take care of. When we step into those areas, we are stepping into this whole realm of worry.

Remember in Matthew 6 when Jesus talked in a very similar line of thinking about worry and about anxiety and about the cares of tomorrow. There were two specific areas that Jesus said we have a natural human tendency to worry about. One of them was health and one of them was material things. Think about that. If you were to write down right now five things that could very easily preoccupy your mind and your heart and cause you to worry in 2021, I can't imagine that there would be too many of us that didn't have on that list something about personal health given that we're living in the midst of the pandemic. Probably even in relation to that, there might be something very likely about provision, material things that are necessary for life itself. It is interesting that Jesus speaks to that and points to those very things that Paul's going to remind us here when we think in terms of what it is to take responsibilities that God says are His and we make them our own.

This word worry or anxious is a word that from the Greek text means to be divided, to be distracted. It means to be attempting to go in different directions. We all

know that simply doesn't work. We have to make a choice. We have to make a decision. It reminds me of what James said in his first chapter about the man who was unstable in all of his ways and that he is constantly being tossed about. You can't live in the wisdom of God and be wavering in your heart and in your spirit. The very word picture here of someone who is divided, of someone who's distracted, of someone who's trying to go in two different directions at the same time, the very word itself gives us a picture of what is in view here and in Paul's mind. On the one hand: okay God, I want to trust You and immediately turning from that to saying I've got to do this myself. So constantly being torn between those two. God gives us a decisive word about this matter of worry and how to deal with it.

Notice secondly dealing with worry. The very first thing I want you to see is what God says about this. This is not simply a matter of weakness. Worry is not simply a matter of weakness. Worry is not simply a morally neutral attitude. I think we very easily think at times that worry is simply one of our weaknesses, that worry is just a morally neutral choice that we find ourselves in. Yet what God says here is the almost exact opposite of that. We might say to somebody I am just a worrier. That puts it in a category of a morally neutral choice. That makes it seem almost as if it is just a weakness that I have. But look what God says about this. The point that Paul makes here is that it's not okay. It's not okay to describe yourself as a worrier and be happy about that or be satisfied with that. What we have here is a command to not do this. It's not a matter of weakness. It's a command. Not to be offensive on this first Sunday of 2021, but it's positively sinful. It's positively sinful to give yourself over to being a worrier and explaining it away as human weakness. God says it is a sin to worry. This is a command that He has given to us. To disobey a command is to sin. God says don't do it. The verbal form here is the present tense which Paul is basically saying – stop it! You are worrying. Stop worrying. Stop being anxious.

Some of you that are a little bit older will remember a television show called the Bob Newhart show. In this particular sitcom Newhart was like a therapist or a counselor, maybe a psychologist or psychiatrist – I don't remember. There's one particular episode that is kind of famous. A lady comes in to see him and she has a problem. Her problem is that she lives in great fear and anxiety and she constantly worries about being buried

alive in a box. She's sitting and she's talking to Newhart about this and he says well, that the solution is very simple. He says I could give it to you in two words. If you need to get a piece of paper and pencil, go ahead. It's just two words. Then he says, stop it! He just kept saying stop it. Stop it. Just stop it. She looks at him and asks, just stop it? Just stop it? I'm supposed to just stop it? That's not too far off from what Paul is saying here. He's obviously giving it to us in a totally different resource and in setting, but he is saying to us stop saying that you're simply a worrier. Stop saying that's just a phobia that you have or a human weakness that you have. No. He's saying it's sin. Those of you that are, and he addresses it here, continually worrying, you need to stop being in that place and that frame of mind. Not under any circumstances are you to be worried about anything. That sounds kind of harsh, doesn't it? When we think about some of the things that we have on our list that we're worried about it sounds kind of harsh for somebody to say to us – stop it. Don't do that.

What does Paul say with regard to how it is that that can be realized. We might say the bad news is worry, is sin. That's true, but the good news is there is something that God says we can do about it and there's a resource available to us. The first three words – worry about nothing. Second three words – pray about everything. There are six words to launch 2021 and to think in terms of your list of plenty of reasons to worry. God's admonishment to us is worry about nothing, instead pray about everything.

Someone has said we should stop worrying because about 98% of the stuff we worry about never happens. That never really helped me. It was always that 2%. It was that 2% that I would focus on. That's honestly why I don't do theme park rides. You know those crazy ones that go all over the place? I don't do those because even if it is less than 2% of those rides that go bad, that's where my mind is when I look at that and I'm thinking sure most people get off of there but what about the ones who don't? So it doesn't really help me to say 98% of the stuff never happens that I would worry about.

Here is what Paul says to us. Pray instead about everything. Pray about everything. The contrast. When you look at that 6th verse, do not be anxious about anything. But. We've seen that word quite a few times in Romans and we love that word where God interrupts. It's an adversative. It's a contrasting statement. It's God telling us in a very forceful way there's a different choice that we are to make here. God, as He

always does when He tells us not to do something when He takes something away like worry, He takes that option away from us, but what does He do? He puts something better. He puts something better in its place. In this case, He's taken away worry and He says to us it's a sin to be consumed with worry. It's a sin to yield your heart and your mind to anxiety about things that God says you're not responsible for and that He is. Instead, He says give yourself over to praying.

The characteristics of what He says here, just notice what He describes for us here. There's three different things that I want to note here. The first thing is that nothing is excluded. Nothing is excluded. Be anxious about nothing. Pray about everything. Pray about everything. The words in everything are in the emphatic position, which is to say they're placed in a position of importance in the order of this sentence. So we focus on the in everything that we are to be bringing to the Lord. We hold nothing back. There is no category in your life in which you determine these are the things that I can handle, these the things I think I can handle, and these are the things that I better take to God. No, he says put it all in the bucket. In everything we are to bring these things to God. Talk to Him about everything, about every circumstance, about every problem, about every issue. If it comes to mind, take it to the Lord in prayer. If God puts it on your heart, take it to the Lord in prayer. What a wonderful habit to develop. What a wonderful habit to develop that when we have something that causes us anxiety or worry it becomes the trigger point for us to take it to the Lord in prayer. In everything.

Notice secondly there's this matter of total dependency. That idea of total dependency is really captured by the fact that there are four different words here, all of them describing this matter of praying. He didn't just say one time pray about it. He went on and uses four different words. The first one obviously – do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer. So he starts off where we might expect and the first word for prayer is the broadest word that the Scriptures used for praying. It's a very general term that just talks about going to the Lord in all of its forms.

The second word is the word supplication. The word supplication has in mind a need, a specific need, something that obviously calls for a specific request. There's something that you're dealing with and there is a very specific issue right in front of you. there's something definite in mind that you can lift up.

The third word is with thanksgiving. So pray, supplication, and with thanksgiving. The idea is of recalling God's goodness. With thanksgiving, recalling the goodness of God. When you think back on 2020, and here we are at the beginning of 2021, we look back on this past year and all the things that happened in 2020. We look back and even in those we are to give thanks, rather than bitterness or resentment or anger any other number of human responses. I deliberately call to mind the faithfulness of God and I give thanks to God for His faithfulness in my life. Gratitude, as we all know, is a transformative attitude. We know what it's like to be on the other side of that and to be ungrateful. It leads to a lot of unhappiness. Gratitude on the other hand leads us to a spirit of joy and thanksgiving.

The last one. The last word is the word request. Here the idea is that of asking. It specifically is the idea of focusing on again something specific, some need, some desire that we have and we talk to God about it. Think about this. In worry, who do we talk to? Who do we talk to when we worry? We talk to either ourselves or we talk to other people. If we're worried about something or anxious about something, we generally spend our time talking to ourselves about it or talking to other people about it. Look at the other side of this. Look at the other choice in this. In prayer, you're talking to God about it. Now it looks to me like we have a choice -- to live a basic self-centered life in which we're consumed with worry or to live a theocentric, a God-centered life in which we're focused on God.

Now look at the last characteristic. This matter of intimacy. We're anxious about nothing, we're praying about everything, and it's by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. The picture that Paul gives us here is one of intimacy. Let your requests be made known to God. We're bringing them to God. We're coming before God. We're coming into the presence of God. We're before the face of God. All of it speaks to this matter of intimacy with God, knowing God, pursuing God. Remember back in the third chapter and verse 10 just a few verses before this, Paul in that wonderful expression said that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection. The focus was I want to know Him. Back in the very first chapter verse 8, "For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus

and it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.”

Do you how many times in the prayers of Paul he prays for people to grow in their knowledge of God? very often. It's one of the things I've been doing for the last recent history for my children and grandchildren. God, create within them a heart and a desire to know you. That is the prayer that we should pray for each other. Our vision statement is that we want to know God. We should pray that we would want to know God more. It doesn't just happen. We need the Spirit of God to stir that desire within us, to push us into that desire more and more. This idea of this intimacy, of talking to a friend because you're worried about nothing and you're praying about everything, and in your praying, in your supplication, in your thanksgiving, in your requests, you're bringing them to a friend. You're bringing them to none other than the Lord Jesus. What happens? What happens when those six words begin to dominate your life? What happens when you're worried about nothing and you're praying about everything?

Just notice lastly the consequences of what Paul puts before us. The first one is one that we would all want. It's peace. The peace of God. The peace of God. Let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God. Do you realize this is the only place in the New Testament this phrase is used like this? And the peace of God. In Romans, we've been talking about peace with God. Romans 5. Peace with God. But this is a result of peace with God and is also a result of our not taking responsibilities that God has said are His and making them mine. It's the result of not worrying. Instead it is the result of praying. We have the peace of God. Get this. This is the Spirit of God saying to us that instead of worrying, if we're praying, we step into this sphere of having the peace of God. That is a direct description of the nature and character of God. That's what He's inviting us to enjoy and to step into. The divine tranquility that is found within the heart of God.

If you want to hear what that sounds like – Isaiah 26. You know these verses. Listen to what he says. “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.” But that statement of verse 3 – you keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You. Who is the person who's in perfect peace? Somebody whose mind is

stayed on God. Who is the person whose mind is stayed on God? It's the person who's worried about nothing and praying about everything. So there's a direct corollary between Isaiah 26 and what he says here. Not natural, but it is very possible. You find yourself worrying at night which is a very common thing. You're lying in bed and anxious thoughts begin to flood into your mind as you're thinking about something that is very prominent in your world, in your life at that point. Someone described it this way and says, "Sometimes God simply comes to us at those moments and says no use both of us staying awake. Why don't you go ahead and go to sleep?" He's got this, right? He's got this. That's what our father does. Remember in the Gospels the night that Jesus was with the disciples on the wind tossed seas and he's sleeping in the boat. That is this picture.

Then the last thing. Protection. The protection of God. The peace of God. We have the protection of God. Look at that word. "And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." It will guard. That's a military term. It's like the posting of a sentry. It is the posting of a guard and there's a guard who is standing watch. Literally and over what? What is he standing guard over? Your heart and your mind. He is standing guard over your heart and your mind. You notice what He is not standing guard over? He's not standing guard over your investments. He is not standing guard over your body. He says heart and mind. He is not standing guard over your possessions. He's guarding your heart. He is guarding your mind. Just as the writer of Proverbs said guard your heart, guard your mind with all diligence, for out of it flows the issues of life. The centrality of our heart and mind in this process. It all comes to us because we are in Christ Jesus.

See that last part of the verse? He will guard your hearts and minds because you are in Christ Jesus. He is speaking this promise to believers. Believers are those who have come to a point in their life at some place and they said God, I can't do this alone. I can't do this by myself. I need Your help. I need Your forgiveness. My sins have been a separation between me and You. I have nothing to offer in terms of how to reach You apart from Your grace and through the death of Your Son, Jesus. So that's who's in Christ Jesus. It's a promise that is given to believers. That is a promise by the way of the gospel that is available to everybody here in this room this morning and everybody

listening online. That gospel comes to each and every one of us, freely and without cost to us. It cost Jesus everything but it comes to us who simply believe that what Jesus did on that cruel cross was all that God requires. When Jesus said it's finished and God said it's enough He meant it. That's the simplicity and the beauty of the gospel of God's grace. If you want to be in this group that can lay hold of this promise this morning, that you don't have to worry about anything but you can pray about everything, then step into the gospel of God's grace. Put your trust in Jesus as your Savior this morning. Tell Him that you've fallen short of His glory and you have nothing to offer Him. You simply receive His gift by His grace.

What do we take away? This matter of overcoming worry. There is no problem too big for God. There's no problem that is too small for Him to care about. There is no problem too small for Him to care about. My friends, here we are at the threshold of 2021 and we have six words that we can lay hold of every day of this coming year so that as we walk by faith and not by sight, God calls us to worry about nothing and pray about everything. Let's do that.

Gracious Father, thank You for these words from the pen of the apostle Paul and by means of Your Holy Spirit to give us such a practical encouragement in a world in which there are plenty of reasons to worry. Father, we're thankful that You have told us that there is in fact nothing that we need to worry about but instead we get to pray about everything. Lord, by Your Spirit, let us lay claim to these verses, these truths. Let us walk in victory. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.