

**Text: Philippians 4:4-7 (Pew Bible, pg.1163)**

**Title: “Praying Your Way Through Worry”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

There’s nothing more basic, more vital or more powerful in our relationship with God than prayer. The more we pray and the more effectively we pray, the deeper our relationship with God grows. But why is it that at times it feels so hard to get through to God? Why are there times when we feel like our prayers are not making it past the ceiling? Why is it that so often we try everything else before we think to ask God? Why is it that we can go for vast periods of time and not even breathing a word to God in prayer? Why is it when we try to pray that all kinds of distracting thoughts flood our minds, like we’re in a battle ... a spiritual battle? God’s Word teaches how to pray through the barriers we face in life. We need to learn how to P.U.S.H. through those barriers ... **Pray Until Something Happens.**

I invite you to open your Bibles this morning to what may well be the most memorized verses in the whole Bible ... Philippians 4:4-7. Perhaps you have memorized this passage, but from time to time we need to be reminded of the rich gold mine of promises that are found here in these verses. The Great Physician of our soul would prescribe that we take these truths and promises, and chew on them to relieve our anxieties, worries and fears. Read Philippians 4:4-7.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Let me take you to a cave called “worry.” As we stand at the opening of this cave it is dark inside. Most of us have been in this cave before. Some of us, when we feel concerned about something, walk a little ways into the cave of worry ... how will the doctor’s report turn out, how will I pay my bills next week, will my son or daughter make the right friends. After walking a short distance into the cave we see that it is so dark and it leads nowhere so we turn around and walk back out into the light without spending much time inside.

Others of us, however, have walked deeply into the cave as if there is something pulling us inside. The concern about the doctor’s report pulls us so deeply into the darkness of the cave of worry that we cannot sleep at night. The concern over the inability to pay our bills pulls us so deeply into the dark cave that it’s all we think about. The concern over our children pulls us so deep into the cave that we’re certain that the worst is going to happen. Deep in the dark cave of worry we can’t see things for what they really are. The darkness presses in around us and we don’t know where to turn ... the cave of worry.

Today if you find yourself in the cave of worry, whether for an hour or a year, let me hand you a flashlight to see your way out ... or better, to see your way through. I want to talk about praying your way through worry to a place of peace. The only real way to win over worry for Christ-followers is to pray and turn it over to God.

Danger is real ... uncertainties are real ... difficulties are real ... and we should be concerned about some things. But there’s a point where legitimate concern turns into the unhealthy worry and corrosive anxiety. And it’s a choice we make. We can choose to dwell on our fears about the future, or we can change the focus of our thinking to the very real presence and promises of God.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Max Lucado tells the story about a man who worried so much that he decided to hire someone to do his worrying for him. He found a man who agreed to be his hired worrier for a salary of \$200,000 per year. After the hired man accepted the job, his first question to his boss was, "Where are you going to get \$200,000 per year?" To which the man responded, "I don't know; that's your worry."

And as much as we sometimes wish we could just pay someone to do our worrying for us, that's not possible ... and it's not the answer.

You need to notice that there's a life being described here that is so incredibly healthy that there is simply no place for worry. Here's the secret to a worry-free life. I think we would all agree that that's the kind of life we all want. In the verses I read earlier there is a string of commands (imperative verbs in the original text) which point us to the life where excessive, obsessive worry is not a problem for us.

## 1. A JOYFUL LIFE (v.4)

**Philippians 4:4 - Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**

The command here is to "rejoice in the Lord" or "continually rejoice in the Lord." Now it may seem odd that the Bible would command us to rejoice. Notice it doesn't say "be happy." That would really be weird.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Moms, have you ever had to tell your child they were going to have to do something they didn't want to do and you said, "You're going to do it and be happy about it."

To rejoice is a choice ... a choice we make by faith to remember that God is in control in every situation that may cause us to worry. When we rejoice in the Lord we delight in Him, even when things are going rotten in our lives.

Notice it says, "Rejoice in the Lord *always*..." That means we do no matter what the circumstances may be. In fact, Paul repeats the command "rejoice." It's like he commands it once, then he pauses to think, "Now is there any circumstance that might be exempt from this? No! Again, I say rejoice."

**ILLUSTRATION** – Paul walked what he talked. On his first visit to this city of Philippi he and Silas were thrown into jail for preaching the Gospel. And in the middle of the night their voices could be heard singing praises to God.

So there is a joyful life where worry simply cannot exist. And then there is...

## 2. A GRACEFUL LIFE (v.5)

**Philippians 4:5 - Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.**

The command here is to "evidence, exhibit or display gentleness."

Now you may wonder what this has to do with worry. Well stop to think about it. When you are worried about something, it's tempting to take it out on the people around you ... to be hard on them.

But when we have a joyful life, we don't just keep it to ourselves. The way others know that there is joy inside of us is that we are gentle with them.

And what allows us to be gentle, and not harsh with others is our realization that "the Lord is near" (v.5). That means God is near us at all times, especially when we face things that could cause us to worry, and then to take it out on others. It also means that the Lord's coming is near. There's coming a day when Christ will set everything straight and all of our enemies will be defeated. Knowing that God is absolutely in control allows me to chill, and to not be hard on the people around me.

So there's a joyful life, and a graceful life, and ...

### 3. A PRAYERFUL LIFE (v.6)

**QUOTE** - Rick Warren: "The more you pray, the less you'll panic. The more you worship, the less you worry. You'll feel more patient and less pressured."

Here is where we actually get down to work of winning over worry. The next command in the text is...

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

The command here is stop worrying. In fact, stop worrying about anything ... not even one thing. And we may think that surely Paul doesn't mean that. But Jesus said the same thing:

**Matthew 6:25 - "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 important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"**

**ILLUSTRATION** - I heard about two women who were having a conversation about worry. One said to the other, "I never worry." The other said, "What do you mean you never worry?" The first woman replied, "Well, the Bible says that worry is sin, and if I'm going to sin I'm going to do something a lot more fun than worrying."

On this Mothers' Day I'm reminded that moms have great concern for their children, whether the children are still at home or out of the home. It's so easy to walk into the cave of worry for your children rather than into the closet of prayer.

So there's another command in Philippians 4:6 ... a positive command: "Present your requests to God."

Put the two imperatives together and you have this, as the Living Bible puts it: “Don’t worry about anything; pray about everything.” “Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray.” The Message

So we pray our way through worry and anxiety to a place called peace.

Three words are used here to describe a believer’s communion with God:

### **ADORATION – “PRAYER”**

This is our approach to God. When we find ourselves starting to walk into the cave of worry, we turn to God in adoration, devotion and worship. This helps us to see the big picture of the the greatness and majesty of God. We understand that God is big enough to handle any problem I have.

You see, when we worry we are acting like practical atheists ... that God doesn’t exist. Forgetting God is the root of all of our miseries in life.

### **PETITION OR SUPPLICATION**

It means to ask for a specific need to be met. Yes, we have permission, in fact there is a command, to pray about our personal needs. And this is no half-hearted asking. This is what Jesus had in mind when He said, “Keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking.” And some of us have never broken through the barrier of worry in our lives because we haven’t disciplined ourselves to shut ourselves up with God and pour out our petitions to Him. We’re still carrying the load ourselves.

### **APPRECIATION – “THANKSGIVING”**

If we will stop long enough to think about it, there’s always something to give thanks about. Notice, this is “in everything.” The Bible says “in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

**Philippians 4:6b - In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**

Present your requests to God. Give it all to Him.

**1 Peter 5:7 - Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**

Sometimes we cast our anxiety and worry on God for a while, then we’re like fishermen ... we reel it back in. We try to take it out of God’s hands. Cast it all on God and leave it there. He cares for you.

So there’s the joyful life, the graceful life, the prayerful life that leads to...

### **4. A PEACEFUL LIFE (v.7)**

**Philippians 4:7 - And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

The result of a joyful life and a graceful life and a prayerful life is a peaceful life.

Notice it talks about the “peace of God.” Peace belongs to God. Can you imagine God wringing His hands in worry? This peace comes from God. It flows into our hearts when we stop worrying and start praying, asking and thanking. Peace floods the troubled soul which has poured everything out to God in prayer.

And this peace “transcends all understanding.” In other words you can’t explain it ... you just know it.

And this peace “will guard your hearts and minds.” Notice where peace touches us ... in our hearts and our minds ... our feelings and in our thoughts.

There’s a powerful word picture that Paul is painting here. It comes from the military world. It means to station a garrison of soldiers around something or someone to protect them. So there very presence of God’s peace stands guard over our hearts and minds. Whenever some anxious care or worry comes our way, the peace of God says, “You cannot enter here.”

And notice that all of this is “in Christ Jesus.” Everything God intends to give us comes to us wrapped in Jesus. All the blessings that God intends to give us come in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. He is our peace as we are united to Him.

**Isaiah 26:3 - You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**ILLUSTRATION** – I heard a story many years ago of a pilot who was flying cargo from one island to another in the South Pacific. As he was flying between two islands out of the corner of his eye he saw a huge rat that somehow got onboard during loading. He knew that the rat could be a problem. It might even chew up a wire that would cause him to crash. The pilot couldn’t leave his seat; the plane would crash. Then he hit on an idea. He tightened his oxygen mask and pulled the plane into a steep climb. Higher and higher he flew the plane into the high altitudes where there was no life-sustaining oxygen. When the pilot landed his plane at the next island he looked in the back of the plane, and sure enough the rat was dead. You see, in the rare air of the high altitude where there was no oxygen, the rat died.

I challenge you to do the same thing with your worries. Pull your life into a steep climb into the high altitudes of communion with God in prayer ... and watch the rat of worry die there.