

How to Win Over Worry • *Philippians 4:4-7*

You can see them everywhere—from the main streets of Athens to the back villages of Jordan to the sandy Sahara towns of Egypt. They are little chains of beads that people hold in their hands and busily rotate. Each bead is rubbed for a moment until the fingers skillfully pass to the next bead. Around and around, over and over, until each bead is rubbed a million times. They are called “worry beads” and they are everywhere a part of the eastern Mediterranean cultures.

Those circles of beads are an apt picture of worry in any culture—going over and over the same concern, rotating the same thoughts a million times, leaving the burden only long enough to circle the chain and finger it all over again. None of us is a stranger to worry.

Worry will ruin your life! It will age your face, gray your hair, ulcer your stomach, sour your whole outlook on life. It is a bitter acid that drips and drips until it eats away your life from the inside out.

Perhaps it is because we know worry to be so powerful that we are invariably surprised by the all-or-nothingness of *Philippians 4:6*: “Do not be anxious about anything.” Don’t worry about anything!

My immediate inclination upon reading such a statement is to try to explain it away. It must mean, “Don’t worry about most things”, or, “Don’t let the worry in your life get out of control.” But it means exactly what it says: “Don’t worry about anything!”

These words were not written in comfortable isolation from life’s problems! They were written by a man who was on death row awaiting the outcome of an appeal, a man who had been sick and shipwrecked and beaten and misunderstood and had faced far more than the usual allotment of life’s problems. These words were written to Christians in a pagan community where economic problems caused significant unemployment and where there were pointed personal disagreements among leading members of the church. These powerful words from God were aimed right at those who were hurting, uncertain, uptight and anxious with good cause. And

they are God’s specific words right now for me and for you: “Don’t worry about anything!”

For those who really want to win over worry and for those who are serious about living victoriously in Jesus Christ, the Bible here gives a 3-step recipe for winning over worry. The first step in *Philippians 4:4* is this: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

This is no mere encouragement to positive thinking. It is a command, not a suggestion. And it is a direct commandment from God: Rejoice! Before he gives any direction or help, God commands, “Rejoice!” It is a matter of simple obedience or disobedience: “Rejoice!”

This command could never be given to a non-Christian. It would be awful, cruel and impossible. All an unbeliever has is circumstances, and when they go bad there can be no rejoicing.

But that’s not the case with the Christian. We have the Lord! He is better than any of life’s circumstances. Belonging to him overshadows all worries. We know that he loves us and guarantees his best in our lives.

To not rejoice is to deny the Lord! It is to say that something else is more important than he is. It is to say that there is a situation God can’t handle. The Bible calls it “blasphemy”!

A practical plan of what we can do to bring us up to speed with God’s thinking is to find a quiet place and a quiet time. Take a blank piece of paper and draw a line right down the middle of it.

On the left side, list all your worries and problems. On the right side, list all the causes for rejoicing in the Lord—God’s love, salvation, promises in the Bible,

plus all the past times God has proved himself to you over and over.

This may be just the type of thing Paul did. Imagine him writing these words from prison in Rome. Boldly he writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Then he begins to wonder if he isn’t coming on a little strong. He looks at his cell. He eyes the Roman guard. He squints from failing vision at the plate of inadequate food. He reflects on the rotten way some people have treated him. He

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mulled over the possibility of a refused appeal and imminent execution by beheading. Rejoice?

But then he thinks about his Lord! He remembers that God loved him while he was still a sinner. He knows that Jesus died for him. He remembers all the great evidences of God's care he has experienced over his lifetime. He pictures the future home being prepared for him in heaven. And he picks up his pen and writes, "I will say it again: Rejoice!"

There is no circumstance that should be allowed to dampen the joy of a Christian. No worry should ever quiet the rejoicing words of a disciple of the Savior. No problem is great enough to turn bitter the believer who follows Jesus Christ as Lord! We belong to Jesus Christ. Therefore, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

But that's only the first part of the recipe. In verse five Paul adds a second step when he tells us to be gracious. He says, "Let your gentleness be evident to all."

Just about every Bible version has a different translation of the Greek word "epieikes", translated here as gentleness. Today's English Version says, "Show a gentle attitude toward all." The Living Bible instructs us, "Let everyone see that you are unselfish and considerate in all you do." And the Jerusalem Bible says, "Let your tolerance be evident to everyone."

What it really means is that when things go rotten for you, be a nice guy! Be patient and gracious and gentle and tolerant and unselfish.

The frequent unchristian response to problems is to be nasty and rotten and bitter. Don't be that way. Be a nice guy! After all, as a Christian you can trust the Lord for everything. You can be nice to people even if they are rotten to you. God will take care of you and them. You can go the extra mile every time and come out ok. And you will be absolutely amazed how effectively this lowers worry!

God asks us not only to be a nice guy but also to let everybody know. You see, if we respond to life's worries the same way as people do who are not Christians, then what does that do for the reputation of God? Nothing. But if we respond to life's worries by being nice guys, then the whole world will take notice and God will get a whole load of glory.

The apostle Paul says, "The Lord is at hand." The Lord is close. He's nearby. He's in control. We don't need to be uptight or angry or sullen or impatient. The Lord is near so we can relax and be gentle, gracious, patient, tolerant and unselfish.

Try it! Take whatever has been bugging you lately, your worries, and relax and be nice to people (especially those who have caused your worries). Just live out your faith and trust in the Lord in the way you relate to other people. It will do wonders in melting your worries away!

A third step in Paul's recipe is found verses 6 and 7. Paul says:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Just as Eskimos have lots of different words for snow, Christians have lots of different words for prayer. Four different types of anti-anxiety prayers are listed right here in this pair of verses. The first one is communication prayer: "in everything by prayer." This simply means staying in touch with God, talking to him regularly about all the things that go on in our lives.

Charleen and I often pray together over the day early in the morning. Anxiety and worry is relieved when the day begins with the knowledge that we've committed it all to God

The time to get a doctor or a church or a mechanic is before you need one. Build a relationship so you can call if an emergency arises. The same goes with prayer. Communicate with God on a regular basis before a crisis comes.

A second type of prayer is "need prayer". That's where we make a list of every single need in our lives and we tell God. He wants to hear about it. He wants us to tell him every day. It's a combination of telling and trusting. Put them together. We tell God our needs and we trust him to meet them in his best way and his best time.

Third on our list is "thanksgiving prayer". Every time we pray we should include lots of thanksgiving for all God has already done for us. Don't become ungrateful!

Thanksgiving is a marvelous cure for selfishness, bitterness, over concern about our immedi-

ate problems and disregard for the problems of other people. Listen when you pray. Are you thanking as much as you're asking? Try it for a fabulous shot in your spiritual arm!

A fourth type of prayer is "request prayer": "present your requests to God." The God who can do anything tells us to ask him for whatever we want. So tell him! Tell him what you need. Even tell him what you want. Lay it all out before the Lord and commit it all to him. What a release! What a burden-lifter! What a day brightener! What an antidote for anxiety!

The trade is our worries for God's peace. And it works! A recent Gallup poll reported that 82% of American people say that when they pray they find an increased calmness in their lives.

These verses don't say that our requests will all be granted but that "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." God's peace is that inner calm that gives us the confidence that God is in charge and we don't have anything to worry about. He takes all the worries on himself.

It's not that we lay back and become irresponsible. We are still disciples and stewards who must faithfully serve him. But we are no longer anxiously laden with worry. Instead we can proceed with peace and purpose.

But what if we pray and the peace doesn't come? Keep praying until the peace does come. Take a vacation day. Pray for hours instead of minutes. Pray until peace replaces worry! Write it down. Put your prayer on paper, in a journal or even a letter to God spelling out all your worries. Seal it and file it as a symbol of worries turned over to the Lord.

Memorize Philippians 4:4-7 and recite it every day, in every prayer, over every worry.

Nineteenth century German-Lutheran theologian Johann Bengel wrote, "Anxiety and prayer are more opposed to each other than fire and water. Are your worries burning with huge flames? Then pour on loads of prayer!"

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Are you a worrier? Here's the cure: Rejoice. Be gracious. Pray.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your

requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

God said it! You can believe it!

To you, our Father, we bring our worries with the full expectation that you will enable us to obey the explicit command of God to worry no more. May we rejoice, be gentle and pray.

And may we find that victory over worry that comes through the precious name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

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Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
www.wooddale.org
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