

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

These words from Paul's letter to the Philippians is one of my favorite passages in the whole Bible. I've read and mediated upon them countless times for encouragement and as a big reminder for me not to worry about **anything**.

Worry. It's something I know I excel at, and I think it's safe to say that I'm not the only one. I believe all of us would really like to know the answer to the question referenced in today's sermon title: **What is** "The solution to the problem of worrying"?

This past week as I was preparing this message, I put a lot of thought and focus on how in His Word God tells us not to worry. And as I did, I noticed how here St. Paul presents the solution to the problem of worrying in what is much like the solution to a math problem. Now, if you're like me the thought of working out a math problem is enough in itself to create anxiety! But **this** math equation is much different. The solution for true peace, joy, and relief from worry is really very easy. In fact, it's as easy as 1+2+3.

1. Pray about Everything

The first part of the equation is to pray; pray about everything. In verse 6 Paul tells us that the way to worry about **nothing** is to **pray** about **everything**!

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to forget to pray? Sometimes we get so wrapped up in a problem or a situation that is confronting us that we try to take it all, whatever it is, into our **own** hands. It's as if we're attempting to carry the burden of the future all by ourselves. And that's something Paul implicitly tells us **not** to do in verse six when he commands, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

It's so easy for me and you to forget to pray and to put everything into God's hands where it belongs rather than trying to carry it all on our own shoulders. It reminds me of the story I read of a young boy who sat with his mom in the doctor's waiting room. While she was sitting, he was darting around from one thing to the next, as kids do. Through the window, he looked at the church across the street. Across the side of the building the congregation had painted a huge sign. Testing his reading skills, he read: "Why pray when you can worry?"

Well, that's not right! Why would a church sign tell you to do something like that? He asked his mom to explain, and he received a brief but memorable introduction to the world of sarcasm. They were proposing the **wrong** answer to get people to think about the **right** answer.

You see it's in our nature, our inborn sinful nature, to worry; to not trust God to be God and take care of us. When this happens, we sin and when we do we need to repent. We need to turn from our sin and turn to the mercy God has so lovingly shown to us in His Son.

Then we remember that the One Who invites us to pray to Him is the same God "who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom 8:32). When Paul tells us here that, "... the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:7), he is quietly reminding our anxious hearts and troubled minds that the peace we have with God in Christ will do far better for us than our anxious worrying ever could. We have God's Word on it—signed and sealed with the blood of His Son!

Instead of worrying and trying to carry the burden of future on our self, we are to present our requests to God and then relax, sit back and, "Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on you own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and he will make your paths straight," as it says in another one of my favorite passages, Proverbs 3:5-6. So, to review, the first part of the equation of how not to worry about anything is to pray about everything.

2. Give Thanks in All Things

The next part of the equation is to give thanks in all things. It's important to notice here that we don't give thanks **for** all things, because not all things are good. Unemployment is not good. Hurt and broken relationships are not good. Illness is not good. Cancer is not good. Death is not good. Terror and bloodshed are not good. Sin, that's in one way or another is behind all these things, is most definitely not good. No, Paul isn't saying to give thanks **for** all things, rather, we give thanks **in** all things, regardless of the situation. And Paul was someone who knew this and dealt with this firsthand. In the last part of today's text, He writes with bold confidence and trust, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (11-13)

Paul knew full well how cruel life could be in this world. He knew just how hard it can be to "give thanks in all circumstances." Still, with God's help he was

able to do it. And we can too. This is why, by the Holy Spirit's inspiration he writes these words of encouragement here and also in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 where he tells us to, "give thanks in ***all*** circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." That's the key! Give thanks to God for the blessings you have in your life, for your family, for your loved ones, for your friends, for your job, for beautiful weather, for all the material blessings God gives you to sustain you from day to day. Even when the circumstances are less than ideal at that moment, give thanks! Remember, God is always in control, even and ***especially*** when circumstances in your life seem out of control. So, "giving thanks in all things" is part two of our equation of freedom from worry.

3. Think about the Right Things

The third part of our math equation to wipe out worry is to "think about the right things." That's what Paul is basically saying when he says in verses 8 and 9, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

There's an old saying that goes, "Garbage in, Garbage out!" If we put garbage into our minds, including negative thinking, we will certainly never overcome worry. Paul says that all the countless concerns of life can be kept at bay from believers if they will think about and fill their minds with all things that are good and true and then rise up and put into practice what they see and hear about him. When ***we*** keep these virtues in the forefront of our minds; things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise, these things will inspire and guide all that we do. So, instead of "garbage in, garbage out," it can be "right things in, and right things out."

4. This Equals God's Peace that Surpasses All Understanding.

Now let's put it all together and add it up: 1) Pray about everything 2) Give thanks in all things 3) Think about the right things; these things will all together ***equal God's peace that surpasses all understanding***. His peace will keep guard over minds so that they will be safe against the assaults of sinful worry.

Of course, this whole equation only works because of Jesus. Remember, "The Lord is at hand" (5). Christ is near and He is the one at work in you completing the good work He started in the day He brought you to faith in Him. You can have and experience true peace in your life because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because Jesus died and rose for you and now lives and

reigns with the Father for all eternity, He also reigns in your life, delivering His peace to by the power of the Holy Spirit working through His Word and Means of Grace. This is how He forgives you of all our sins, including the sin of worry. This is how He strengthens you to trust Him more and more each day. This is how He continues to prepare you for when He will be “at hand” visibly on the Last Day to deliver you to life everlasting.

In the meantime, we move forward, we press on with our lives here and now. We study God’s Word together and at home and we come right here to this place to receive forgiveness for our sins and strength for our faith through His Word and Sacraments - Baptism- and the Lord’s Supper. And as we do, we, 1) pray about everything, 2) give thanks in everything, and 3) think the things that are right. This all adds up to God’s great gift of freedom from worry. And it’s how... “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (7) until life everlasting. Amen!