

TURNING WORRY INTO PRAYER

Philippians 4: 4-9

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

A member of our congregation mentioned to me that she saw an image of telephones in heaven. There were maybe 100 phones lined up for incoming calls to God from earth. Ninety-eight were phones for prayer requests. The last two were marked as the phones which only accepted words of thanks. The point is that our prayers of celebration of God's goodness are too often the minority of our prayers.

Celebrate God. Giving thanks and celebrating God is what Paul calls us to do in his letter to the Philippian Church. There was division in the church and Paul wanted them to turn their thoughts toward joyful celebration, prayer and thanksgiving. Paul really wanted them to celebrate God so he repeated, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!"

Paul was writing this letter from prison to encourage the church toward celebration and healing. Paul and the Christians there thought that Jesus was coming back very soon. It was imminent in their minds! Paul was encouraging the people of Philippi to celebrate God, and let their gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near!

The Lord is near to us as well. Let us celebrate that God is not far away, but He is with us in the presence of the Holy Spirit. In fact, we are a temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6: 19). Living with the knowledge of the Holy Spirit's presence within us is a profound knowledge that God, in his love, lives within us. We also know from Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from his love. That gives us reason to celebrate God!

Fanny Crosby lost her eyesight at 6 weeks of age. She wrote over 8000 hymns. Some examples are 'Blessed Assurance', 'Praise Him, Praise Him', and 'To God Be the Glory'. She lived into her 90's writing thousands of hymns in her lifetime. On her 92nd birthday she said cheerfully that in the entire world if a person could be found more joyous than she was, they were to bring that person to Fanny so she could shake their hand. That is to say, that Fanny was not without her concerns and worries.

Committing oneself to prayer: Paul says, "*Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication and with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*" When you worry, turn those worries into prayers. Be committed to prayer not only as your defense against worry, but as a means of gaining a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. When you start to worry, be reminded that a prayer is needed now. Then over time as the worries diminish the habit of prayer has been established.

Let it go! A motivational speaker raised a glass and asked the audience how heavy was the glass. Answers were ringing out...8 oz., 12 oz., 20 oz. She replied saying that the weight does not matter. It depends on how long you hold it. If you hold it for a minute, that is no problem. If you hold it for a half an hour, your arm will start to ache. Holding it for hours will cause your arm to become numb and feel paralyzed. The weight of the glass will not change, but the longer it is held, the heavier it becomes.

We could say that the stresses of life are like that. We hold on to them for a little while and it does not affect us. Dwelling on them a bit longer will cause us pain. If you dwell on them day after day, you will become paralyzed.

Friends, let go of the worries. Don't carry them through the evening or overnight. Put them down! Let it go! Jesus said as recorded in Matthew 11: 28, 29: *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*

But I still worry! We have received teachings for years about how we are to stop worrying. Yet, we do not seem to change from our ways of worrying. For some of us, we seem to be more 'wired for worry'. I believe the reason for this is both genetic and learned behavior. I believe that worry has a place in our Christian faith. It is definitely a part of life on this side of heaven. The question is: How can we use worry for God's Kingdom? In other words, how can fear and worry have a part in making us stronger believers? There is a paradox here: God uses something that causes us pain and can transform it into something beautiful! Individuals who suffer from worry, negative thoughts, fears and feeling down/ depressed, are often drawn to think of things more deeply, and provide us with insights in their reflections both in words and in other creative outlets.

Certainly, too much worry is destructive but if we are open to God's love, he can use it as a tool to build faith. Worry will always be with us, but what are you doing with it? Paul provides wisdom here by telling us that when we are worrying - to take those worries and transform them into prayers! And, when we do that, we open the opportunity for the peace of God that transcends our own understanding to guard our hearts and minds into Christ Jesus (Philippians 4: 6,7).

Think about Praiseworthy things with thanksgiving. To help us put this into action, Paul encourages followers of Christ at the church in Philippi (and us today), to develop the habit of building a thankful spirit by being mindful about things that are honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, and all other things that are worthy of praise.

People of God: Celebrate God's goodness with thanksgiving and allow the peace of God to enter. Let it go and allow our Lord to transform those worries into prayers. Amen.