

Dealing with Life's Hardships and Uncertainties

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[0 : 00] Have you noticed how all the news headlines, they're just filled with hardship or uncertainty, for example.

Can you imagine the hardship of all those who are trying to deal with the destruction of Hurricane Harvey?

I mean, can you imagine what they're trying to do right now, all throughout Southeast Texas, Louisiana, throughout the path of Harvey? Then think about the uncertainty of Hurricane Irma. Right now, out in the Atlantic, not knowing really where it's going, where it's going or if it's going to strike the United States.

Then there's the uncertainty of the North Koreans. What are they going to do? We have our own personal hardships and uncertainties right here in Pickens County and really right here in this room.

[1 : 15] Have you ever stopped and thought on any given Sunday when we gather in this service and in your Sunday school class? There are people who are dealing with serious health issues, their own or a close family member.

At least every month, members of our church, people sitting in this room, are dealing with the grief from the death of a close family member or friend.

There's always job uncertainties. Always some kind of family crisis, it seems. And then, if we're honest, from time to time, we come in this room, we have emotional and spiritual struggles that maybe no one knows about.

So really, hardships and uncertainties, they're just a way of life. And that's real personal when it affects us, it doesn't.

Well, what one word best describes the way most people deal with hardship and uncertainty? Wouldn't worry be that word?

[2 : 39] Or stress? Anxiety? It seems that some people, they think worry is their duty. I have a family member that over the years, after I've gotten over being sick or some kind of issue in my life, their response was, well, I was worried about you, as if that was supposed to comfort me.

That was their way of helping me. I worried about you. We know that worry is one of the most common ways that people deal with problems, but it's not the way that God intends for us as His children to deal with our problems.

We know that, but it doesn't always prevent us from worrying, does it? We struggle, just like everybody else. Things are going on in our lives, and we are at least tempted to worry, to get all stressed out.

Over what is about to happen, or what we're involved in right now. Well, today I want us to take a refresher course. For most everybody in this room, it'll be a refresher course.

In overcoming worry, a refresher course in what to do instead of worry, that the Apostle Paul provides for us in Philippians chapter 4.

[4 : 09] If you would, turn to Philippians chapter 4, and I want us to look together at two verses of Scripture, where Paul deals with this issue. Really, he confronts it head on, telling us that as God's people, we're not to worry.

He gives us an antidote. He gives us what we should do in place of worry. And he tells us why we shouldn't worry, how God, if we'll respond the right way, how he will help us.

That's what we're going to look at. Read with me, Philippians chapter 4, verses 6 and 7, and keep your Bibles open the entire time, because we're just going to look at this back and forth.

Philippians 4, beginning in verse 6. Do not be anxious about anything, or do not worry about anything, some translations will say.

But in everything, by prayer and supplication, or prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, which is beyond comprehension, some will say.

[5 : 25] The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. What we see here is Paul providing a better way, an alternative, to dealing with hardship and uncertainty in our life.

And he first points out that worry is never the answer. Here's how he says it, very direct. Don't worry about anything. Do not be anxious about anything.

Now I want you to understand, Paul did not write that from the comfort of his easy chair looking out over the ocean somewhere.

Paul wrote, do not be anxious about anything from Rome, where he is under house arrest, at all times he is chained to a Roman soldier, and he is waiting on his court appearance before Caesar. Paul's under arrest, chained to a Roman soldier, as he dictates this letter. And he doesn't know, sooner or later, he's going to appear before Caesar, he doesn't know if he's going to be condemned to death, if he's going to be put in prison, or if he's going to be set free.

[6 : 51] There's a lot going on in his life that would make the normal person anxious. Paul's not the normal person, or he's not responding as the normal person would be.

Paul tells us, do not be anxious about anything. Now, Paul understood how easy it would be to worry just like everybody else.

I mean, he's just a real human being, a real man. If you read through the book of Acts about his travels, he faced all kinds of hardships, put in prison on several occasions, beaten at times, even beaten to the point he was left for dead on one occasion.

There were times he didn't have enough to eat, times he was abandoned by his friends. If you read some of the things he writes of a personal nature in his letters, there's a lot of uncertainty about what's going to happen in the future.

He wants to go to this place, but he doesn't know if God's going to let him or not. He's concerned about a church, and he hasn't heard from them. He's concerned about some of his friends.

[8 : 02] He doesn't know where they are. There's a lot of things in Paul's life that cause him to at least be tempted to be worried, to be all stressed out.

And so, as he writes this, makes this statement, do not be anxious about anything. Paul is writing to Christians in the church at Philippi, but I really think, in light of all that's going on in his life, he's reminding himself as well.

Don't be anxious about anything. Let's try to understand what Paul is talking about when he tells us not to worry. Now, we need to understand, worry is not the same thing as concern.

When he says, do not be anxious about anything, he's not saying, don't care about anything.

Nowhere in the Bible are we as Christians taught to be unconcerned about what's going on around about us.

We are never called to try to distance ourselves from reality. We're never called to try to be unemotional, uninvolved, or unconcerned about what's going on in our life and in people around about us.

[9 : 23] I want you to think. Jesus rejoiced with people who were rejoicing and he wept with those who were weeping at times.

There were times Jesus went to parties with his friends. There was one time in particular that most everyone knows. Every child knows the shortest verse in the Bible.

Jesus wept. Well, he was weeping at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. Jesus got angry at times.

Jesus was far from detached and unemotional, uninvolved in people's lives.

Jesus was very much involved and concerned about what was going on. He laughed with people.

He partied with people. He wept with people. He hurt with people.

And he got angry a lot of times at the religious hypocrites and confronted them over some of the ways they were distorting the truth of God's word and some of the ways they were taking advantage of people they were supposed to be helping.

[10 : 29] Worry does not mean don't be concerned, don't care, don't be involved. Worry literally means to be divided, to be pulled apart. Jesus addressed the sin of worry in Matthew chapter 6 immediately after he had said no one can serve two masters.

I want you to look at it. Matthew chapter 6, and by the way, beginning in verse 25, Jesus gives a long statement about why we should not worry.

He actually says it three times, do not worry. He compared people who worry with pagans, not people who are believers and know God as their heavenly father.

But look at what it says in verse 24. No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God in money. But note the very next verse, therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life.

[11 : 42] You cannot be divided, serve God in money, God in things. And you can't be divided in terms of where your trust is about the details of life.

What he's talking about is we've got to have a single-minded devotion to God. We've got to really trust Him, seek His will above all things, and know that He's our heavenly Father. He can be depended on.

He can be trusted. Worry is a sign that we don't trust God. Worry is, let me rephrase that, worry is a sign that we don't trust God completely.

That we have a divided mind. When you're worried, when I'm worried, and there's times we give in to this temptation and we just get all stressed out, don't we?

When we worry, we would not say, I absolutely do not trust God. If we were pinned down, I do trust God, but. I do trust God to take care of my children, but.

[12 : 51] I do trust that God's going to work things out in this situation with my job, but. When we worry, we trust God some, but not absolutely.

We trust God some, but not enough to refrain from letting our emotions and imaginations run away with us.

We trust God some, but not enough to not get all stressed out. Now, let's think for a moment. Does worry ever do any good?

When you get stressed out, you're all anxious, you're all tied up in knots, you can't sleep, you can't eat. Does it do any good? Does it help the situation? Does it help you? Well, you know the answer. Worry is one of the most useless things that a person can do. It never changes anything. Jesus pointed that out in that Matthew chapter 6, chapter, section, where he preached on, talked about worry.

[13 : 55] Look at it. In verse 27 from the New Living Translation, he says, can all your worries at a single moment to your life, can all your worries do anything to change your situation?

Can it change you? Now, worries can make you sick. Worried and you get all stressed out can have harmful effects, but never good effects.

Now, one thing we need to be clear about, and I think most people would understand this, but for those who don't, when Paul tells us, do not be anxious about anything, he's not saying, well, don't do anything.

He doesn't mean that if there's something you need to do, don't do it. If you're in a situation and you're worried or you're tempted to worry, but there's something you can do to change it, then you should do that.

If you've got an, if you think you've got some kind of health problem right now, some things are going on in your body, with your body that you think's not right, and you're concerned, you're stressed out about it right now, instead of worrying about it, why don't you go to the doctor?

[15 : 20] That would make sense, wouldn't it? And I know we, as men, a lot of times, we ignore things, and, you know, a lot of guys just, just get sick because they wouldn't go to the doctor.

That's not our finest moment, guys, when we know something's wrong, and we get all stressed out, we're tense, but we won't do anything about it.

If you think your job is not stable, if there's a good likelihood that by the end of the year your company's gonna shut down, instead of you just getting all stressed out about it, why don't you start looking for something else?

Why don't you get your resume together? Why don't you start asking around, looking around, and make, you know, find something else that you can do if it truly does break down or shut down?

It's early in the school year, but some of you may be already getting stressed about your grades. Don't worry about it. Just study.

[16 : 28] Study. And don't pray those prayers like I used to pray. Lord, if you'll just get me through this test, I'll study better for the next one. Lord, if you'll just let me get through this semester, I'll never do that again.

To be honest with you, I didn't intend for it to be this way, but those were just all lying prayers. Instead of making excuses, instead of getting all worked up, stressed out about it, I should have just

studied.

If there's something in your life that's giving you a problem, and it's just stressing you out, you're just all tied up about it, and there's something you can do, do it.

But if you can't, don't stress out. Worry won't help. Even worse, it dishonors God, because when we worry, it's like saying to Him, I really don't trust you.

Now, if worry's wrong, what's the right way to deal with hardship and uncertainty? Well, Paul tells us, pray about everything. Look at verse 6. But in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[17 : 41] Paul doesn't say, just don't worry. He provides us with an alternative to worry. He says, take your problem to God in prayer. Prayer is the Christian solution to worry.

Now, I want to emphasize, prayer is the Christian's alternative to worry. When Jesus taught us to pray, and Jesus gives us the best model prayer, His teaching on prayer, His teaching on everything is what's best.

But when Jesus teaches us to pray in Matthew chapter 6, beginning about verse 9, in Luke chapter 11, He tells us to always begin our prayer. How?

Our Father. Jesus talks about praying to God from the relationship of being His child, our Father. Only a Christian can pray that prayer. Only a Christian, only someone who has truly repented of their sins but their trust in Jesus has been born again by the Spirit of God, has been forgiven and made a child of God.

[18 : 54] made right with God. Jesus very clearly said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me. The only way that anyone can know God as their Father is through a right relationship with Jesus Christ.

And that's what enables us to be able to pray. If you want to be able to take your problem to God in prayer, instead of worrying about it, make sure you have a real relationship with God as your Father through your faith in Jesus.

Make sure that you have a close relationship with Him because you're spending time with Him every day, talking to Him, listening to Him, talking to Him in prayer, listening to Him as He speaks through His Word so that when something does come up, when you need to talk to Him, you don't have to reintroduce yourself to Him.

The relationship is strong. It's intact. And note that Paul emphasizes that we can make specific requests to God. He's talking about praying in general but also uses the word supplication or some translations use the word petition.

That's just asking God for stuff. If someone said, that's help me kind of prayers. Asking God to work in your home situation, to work in relation to that job.

[20 : 17] Asking God to work, help you in relation to your relationship with someone. Matt Chandler does a good job of explaining the relationship between prayer and worry. Matt Chandler is a pastor, has a great way of communicating the truth of God's Word.

We've used some of his studies on Sunday nights so some of you are familiar with him. I want you to look at what he says. Really, prayer and worry are of the same essence.

They are both a rehearsing of circumstances, a mulling over, and a kind of mental and emotional chewing. But in worry, there's no connection, no traction.

It's like spinning our wheels. Worrying is like trying to travel in a rocking chair. But when we pray, we are worrying at God.

We take those anxieties and direct them Godward, taking them to him, placing them before him, and of utmost importance, handing them over.

[21 : 20] This is why Martin Luther says, pray and let God worry. Chandler goes on to say, we have a supreme example of this supplication in the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Facing his impending arrest, torture, and execution, Jesus is so grieved and broken that he is sweating blood as he prays.

He prays, my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. But then he adds, nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.

What has Jesus done, Chandler asks? He has obeyed the command not to worry by worrying at God. He takes his anxiety to the Father and hands it over.

There's always a situation in our life where we're tempted to worry. The idea is don't pretend it doesn't exist. Take it to God.

[22 : 27] Talk to Him about it. You know, Peter must have learned that from Jesus because he writes this, casting all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.

When you face hardship and uncertainty, and you will if you're not now, learn to take it to God in prayer. One way to do this is ask God for the wisdom to know what you ought to do.

In a lot of situations that we are stressed out about, there's something that we know we need to do. Well, go to God and ask Him, Lord, give me the wisdom.

Help me to understand what it is that I need to do. Ask Him to guide you in developing a plan of action when it's clear you've got to do something.

But in some situations, there's just nothing you can do. Or there's nothing you should do. That's the time that we ask God to help us and trust Him to take care of it and then not worry about it anymore.

[23 : 39] Note what else Paul says about our prayers. He says, do it with thanksgiving that your requests be made on to God. This doesn't mean you thank God for your problems. You don't thank God.

It's not saying here we thank God that you're hurting, that you're suffering. But we are to thank God in our problems. There's a big difference. You know, no matter what's going on in our lives, we've always got a lot to be thankful for if we're Christians.

If we're Christians, we are children of God and God has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. As we were singing about earlier, nothing can ever separate us from God and His love.

Nothing. No one. No thing. God is for us because we're His children. Another thing we need to think of and we need to give thanks for, this world is not all there is.

You know, for a lot of people, their whole concept of reality is just what they see. what they feel, what's happening right now. But for us as Christians, we know better.

[24 : 53] We know that God is preparing a new heaven and a new earth for us, His people. Jesus talked about going to prepare a place for us.

one day, one day, one day, either after we die or if we live long enough when the Lord comes back into this world, one day, all the hardships and uncertainties of life in this world will be no more.

One day, all that there will be will be a new heaven and a new earth where we are, where we're with people that we know who are Christians, and we're living the life that God intends for us to live, glorifying Him, serving His purpose, doing something meaningful as His children for all eternity.

We have a lot to be thankful for. Paul tells us not to worry but to pray. And then he gives us a reason for such prayer. Look at the last thing, verse 7, the peace that replaces worry.

It says, And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. I want you to understand this. Paul does not say that your prayers will make everything okay.

[26 : 15] It is, it is not true that if you have enough faith, if you pray just the right prayer, then your sufferings will end.

That's false teaching. That's ungodly teaching. That's just totally contrary to what we see happening in the Bible. God never promises that if you pray a certain prayer, if you have a certain amount of faith, that He will take all your troubles away.

But what God does promise is to be with us in our troubles when He doesn't take them away. I want you to look at what a man by the name of Joe Thorne says because he does a great job of describing how God works in relation to suffering.

Look at it. God does not promise to rid your life of affliction and difficulty. He does, however, offer to give you the grace needed to suffer well.

It isn't wrong to ask God to relieve you of your pain, but it is more important that in the midst of the pain, you rely on the promise of God to work such experiences for His glory and your good.

[27 : 26] To use these times as a means of perfecting your faith, strengthening your spirit, and transforming your life in such a way that you are becoming more like Jesus.

Paul, in his own way, tells us something like this in Romans 8, 28. And we know that in all things, he's been talking about suffering up to that point.

And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. A lot of times, we don't understand what God's doing.

We don't understand how anything good could come from certain situations. That's where faith comes in. That we trust God, that He is great and that He is good. He's involved in this world.

He's involved in our lives. He's involved in all situations. Working in such a way that ultimately, He will be glorified, His purpose will be accomplished, and we will develop, as Christians, we will develop more Christ-like character.

[28 : 33] That's God's real goal. Understand, God never promises to rescue us from all trouble. But He does promise to replace our anxiety with His peace.

Think for just a moment. How do you feel when you're all stressed out? When you are really worried? Don't you feel uncertain? Nervous?

Tired? Afraid? Well, when we learn to trust God and pray instead of worry, this verse is telling us that He will give us a peace within our soul that cannot be described with words.

Let's think about it. What is this peace? It is a supernatural experience. It's something that God gives to His people within our soul that cannot really be explained.

It's beyond comprehension. But it can be experienced. peace. Here's what I want you to think.

Some of us in this room, we could stand up and talk about how we've experienced that peace.

[29 : 48] There have been times in my life when I have prayed for a person, for a family member, a situation that I'm really close to and involved in.

And God didn't make it go away but He gave me a sense of peace that it's going to be He's with me and I can just continue on. Some of you in this room have told me yourself how in the midst of some kind of difficulty, that's how God helped you.

He just gave you what you needed to be calm, to have wisdom to know what to do and to act smart, wisely in the midst of a very difficult stressful situation.

Some of you in this room know this because you heard it but there have been members of our church who have died and they looked me in the eye one in a hospice room at a hospice house and told me that they had peace, they were ready to go, they knew they were going to be in the presence of the Lord soon.

Some of you have heard something like that. I've heard that in a home. I've heard people who know death is imminent, it's going to happen and they look me in the eye and a lot of times they smile, it's going to be alright.

[31 : 28] That is a peace that cannot be explained. If a person is not a Christian, they cannot comprehend that. That's the grace of God working in the life of His children to prepare them to come into His presence in a peaceful, in a calm, in a way that's not all stressed out.

If we'll pray instead of worry, we'll discover what John Piper says about peace, the peace of God. Look at it with me. When we let our requests be made known to God like this, in the devotion of prayer, in many specific requests for help, with a heart that is thankful for everything God designs for us, the pleasures and the pain, then His peace will guard our minds and free us from anxiety in a way that defies mere rational explanation.

It surpasses all understanding. Here's what I want us to think as we wind this up. We all face hardships and uncertainties.

And when we do, we have two choices. We can worry. We can subject ourselves to all kinds of fears and stress and misery.

Or, we can pray and trust God to do what only He can do and give us the wisdom to do what He wants us to do.

[33 : 03] If we will do that, He promises to give us this supernatural power to experience peace in the midst of the hardship, in spite of the uncertainty.

But you know, this is a choice we've got to make in every difficult situation. It's not a once and for all kind of decision. We may struggle with it every day.

In some stressful situations, we may struggle many times throughout the day and many times call out to God to give us what we need for the moment.

But if we'll learn to really trust God, that He really is in control, and that He is working everything out according to His good purpose, we can and we will avoid worry.

We can have it replaced with a satisfying peace of God deep within our soul. But here's the thing, you as a Christian, you got to make the choice.

[34 : 09] in every situation, whether it's stressful, whether there's uncertainty, whether it's trouble, whatever, you got to make the choice. Am I going to worry and get no relief, or am I going to pray and trust God and experience His peace?

Let's pray together now. Dear God, show us how we should respond. you know how we normally respond. You know what we normally do when we get under stress, when there's a lot of uncertainty, when there's fear, when there's suffering. Father, show us if we are more untrusting of you than trusting. Help us, Father, to confess our sin, if it is, and truly repent and seek your forgiveness. Help us, Father, to understand that as your children in this world. You want us to learn to pray and trust you and depend upon you and obey you. And just drive home the point, dear God, that's the way to experience your peace. In an attitude of prayer, you just listen to the Lord and obey Him as He speaks to you. [35 : 47] If you'd like me to pray for you during this time, I'll be here at the front and would be glad, honored to do that with you. Let's pray for you.

After meeting on the sun D other h