

Walking in God's Promised Peace in the Midst of Chaos and Worry

Her dream was to serve as a teacher in a Christian school. But she did more than dream. She had a plan and executed it. She went to college, studied hard, worked part-time, finished college, married the man of her sanctified dreams—and then it happened: She landed her first teaching job. The school where she did her student teaching hired her. At last, she was going to be at the helm of her own classroom, with the opportunity to pour into the hearts and minds of young children.

Shortly after this young lady received the good news about her hire, I saw her and her husband at a church in the northern suburbs of Chicago. I had just preached a sermon on Philippians 4:6-7, "How to Overcome Worry." After the service was over, as people stood in line to greet me, I saw her with her husband. As they approached me, I was so glad to see them, but it was obvious she was deeply troubled. Worry was inscribed in bold letters all over her face. Her anxious demeanor was out of character. She was usually upbeat, seeming to live life above the clouds of circumstance, but this morning was different. Noticing her eyes were inundated with tears of trouble, I gently asked her, "What's wrong?"

She looked past me and could not answer. Her husband put his arm around her shoulder, and answered kindly on her behalf, "She starts her teaching job tomorrow, and she is deeply worried about how she will do." Standing in the church building on Sunday, this competent and diligent young lady was worried about how she was going to do in the classroom on Monday. She was caught in the grip of performance anxiety and worry.

All of us worry. We worry about today. We worry about tomorrow. We worry about money. We worry about our health. We worry about our young children. We worry about our adult children. We worry when life is going well. We worry when life is not going well. We worry when there are signs of trouble. We worry when there are no signs of trouble. In the damp and dark dungeons of painful memories, some of us still have past worries locked under bolt and key with the prison guards of old pain and bitterness standing sentinel. It seems we are imprisoned by worry and anxiety.

Of course, worry is different from concern. We should be concerned about others, we should care about problems, and areas of life that need to be addressed (Phil. 2:20). But worry is another matter. Worry is concern divorced from our heavenly Father. Worry is concern separated from the goodness, wisdom, love, faithfulness and grace of God. Worry is concern turned inward and deformed, rooted in the assumption that we are dealing with life alone, that we are in the fight of everyday living by ourselves. Worry is concern rooted in unhealthy fear and unbelief. In some sense worry is a form of practical atheism expressed through attitudes, emotions and thinking.

But here is the good news: Right in the middle of the throes of worry-filled situations, as a result of believing prayer, God promises to give us his peace (see Phil. 4:6-7). He does not promise to remove the difficulties and solve all the problems in our lives, even though he may do that. Instead, the Lord promises is to grant every prayerful and trusting follower of Christ the peace that passes all understanding. Our experience of peace in all situations of life is the opposite of the experience of anxiety.

Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27)." Our Lord has bequeathed the gift of peace to his anxious children. The

peace of Christ is our legacy.

The peace Jesus bequeaths to us is different from the world's peace. The world's peace is based on what happens and is rooted in the soil of circumstances. Christ's peace, on the other hand, is the product of the Spirit's work in our hearts and minds (see Gal. 5:22), and is independent of and transcends all circumstances. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of God's peace is its power to protect our hearts and minds from the vicious assaults of worry in the midst of worrisome circumstances and the anxious seasons of life.

Near the end of his own life, the apostle Peter wrote, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord" (2 Pet. 1:2). The more we grow in our experiential knowledge of God in the Spirit's power based on God's word, the more our peace will deepen and expand. My prayer for you is this: may His peace be yours today in fullest measure.

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise/When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies/I draw the closer to Him, from worry He sets me free/His eye is one the sparrow, and I know He watches me. {eo}

Dr. Winfred Neely is a professor of hermeneutics, homiletics and pastoral studies at Moody Bible Institute, Senior pastor of Judson Baptist Church in Oak Park, Illinois and the author of *How to Overcome Worry* (April 2017).