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Title: The Enemies of Gratitude: Worry

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Text: [Philippians 4:1-9](#)

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We are in the second week of our series called *The Enemies of Gratitude*. This is a time of year when we turn our focus on gratitude, on being grateful people. There are things that keep us from gratitude, from being grateful people. Our focus in life gets misplaced. Here are a few examples:

- How things used to be better
- How we aren't getting what we think we deserve
- How life's struggles are keeping us down

These things work to keep us from seeing the blessings right in front of us, from being truly grateful people. They keep us from expressing and experiencing gratitude. Using scripture as our guide, we work to return our focus to the blessings in front of us, to live with an attitude of gratitude.

Today, we turn our focus to worry. The Bible tells us not to worry about anything.

Right here, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "Don't be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:6a). We may think, this doesn't mean anything because Paul has it easy, but consider this:

- He is in prison
- He is on death row
- He's been almost stoned to death
- He experienced all of that for preaching the Gospel

But he writes, don't be anxious, don't worry about anything. Before Paul, Jesus would preach in his Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, "Who among you, can add a single hour to your life by worrying?"

On some level, we know both Jesus and Paul are right. But on another level, neither of them make very much sense. All around Paul, his friends, other apostles, are being persecuted for preaching the gospel.

Families are being torn apart. Fear is prevalent in the hearts of so many.

Today, we look around as war continues in Israel and Gaza, the heartbreaking loss of life for which God weeps. Civil unrest continues in places such as Guatemala. Our democracy in the United States is in a precarious position. Each of us can name something in our lives for which we are anxious, whether it be health, a relationship, family dynamics, whatever it may be.

There is a LOT that can be worried about. Into the chaos, scripture speaks a word, Paul spoke a word:

Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! ⁵Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. ⁶Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. ⁷Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-7).

This is all so practical and nice and in theory should work, like we can cross-stitch these verses on a pillow for our comfort.

But this text which tells us

- The Lord is near.
- Don't be anxious, don't worry for anything.
- Bring things up to God.
- Give thanks.

Well, many days, that doesn't make any sense. Even if we wanted to do this, it's hard to do.

A man was wanting to learn to waterski in his 40s. He had been out on the lake a couple of times, and his family was working with him, and he was getting pretty good at it. He was getting so good that he decided that perhaps he could ski on just one ski. However, the boat could not generate enough power to get him up on only one ski. When he was back in the boat, he noticed a button labeled power-tilt. Not knowing anything about boats or engines, he hit this button. He got back out, ready to ski and told his wife, who was driving the boat to hit it. The bow of the boat soared out of the water at a 45 degree angle and moved like it had been shot out of a cannon. Adequate power to get his body out of the water on one ski was not a problem. He gestured wildly for the boat to slow down, yet they had no pre-arranged signal. They thought their dad wanted to go faster. He says later that it did not occur to him in the moment to let go of the rope. He says, "I did find out I could ski on one ski. I just needed power."

I love that story because often in life, we just need some power—the good kind of power, the type of power that comes from the Spirit, the type of power that helps us move forward in faith.

I believe what is powerful about this text is that it is not removed from its circumstances.

Paul writes, “Don’t be anxious. Rejoice. Be grateful. Find the peace that passes all understanding. At this time, for Paul, Nothing is going well.

We live in a time and culture that teaches us a peace that ignores, a peace that is detached, a peace that is temporary. What the letter to the Philippians encourages us to find is a peace that passes all understanding. A peace that is not detached from our circumstances. A peace that is not detached from the world. A peace that is not dependent on things simply breaking our way. One type of peace is temporary. The other is permanent.

I heard the story of the personal diary of a young man where he shares his thoughts late one night in a hospital room, sitting beside the bed of his young spouse who is critically ill, worrying, waiting, wondering. I am sure that all of us would be tempted to choose bitterness or resentment or despair in that painful situation. But listen to what he wrote, sitting there beside her bed in that dimly lit room, listen to the choice he made:

"She may die before morning. But I have been with her for four years. Four years. There is no way I could feel cheated if I did not have her for another day. I never deserved her for a single moment. God knows that. And I may die before morning. What I must do now is to accept the justice of death and the injustice of life. I've lived a good life, longer than many, better than most. Tony died when he was twenty. I've lived 32 years. I could not ask for another day. What did I do to deserve birth? It was purely a gift. And I am me, and that is a miracle. I have no right to a single moment. Some are given a single hour, yet I have had 32 years. Few can choose when they will die. I choose to accept death now. As of this moment, I give up my right to life. I give up my right to her life too.

"But wait! It's morning! I am being given another day. Another day to live and read and smell and walk in glory. I am alive for another day. And she is alive. It's a gift! Another gift!

"Thanks be to God!"

This peace that passes all understanding is a peace that surpasses human reasoning but is in line with the very nature of God.

Here is the challenge for today: We need to consider where we invest our trust. Our confidence in temporary things is always temporary. When we build joy on a shaky foundation, it can always be taken away. Letting go of worry is not a matter of ignoring what is wrong, rather it's about a confidence in what is right—what is good and pleasing and everlasting.

It's about making our foundation, our source of joy, the love of God and the good news of Jesus Christ. It's about increasing our trust, investing our trust in God's peace—the peace that passes all understanding.

Let us pray.