

“Trying Not to Worry”
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Philippians 4:6-7

6Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Some of you may not know this about me, but I’m a worrier. When I make a decision about anything in my life, I need to know all of the specifics right away, I need to know what is expected of me, and I need to have a plan. I need to know exactly how things are going to play out or I just stew about it and get anxious.

When I see my friends taking risks, or doing something that could get them in trouble or hurt, I worry. I usually say something cautioning them about their behavior. In college that earned me the nickname “Mama Kass” with my friends.

When I work with kids or counsel camps, I’m always the one worrying about safety. I’m the annoying counselor that makes the campers stop climbing all over the dining hall deck railings because someone will fall and get hurt. Or, when the campers are getting ready for bed and decide it’s a good idea to jump from top bunk to top bunk around the room, I’m usually the one that ends that because I know someone will get hurt.

So I spend a lot of time and energy worrying about things. So when things don’t work out exactly like I expect them to, I sometimes freak out. I mean I usually adapt pretty quickly, but only after a minor meltdown.

In August, 2010 I made the decision to transfer back to my hometown and take an internship at a church in KC. And I worried about it. I became aware of this job opportunity pretty early on this summer, but I didn’t know for sure that I had the job until August 1. I had to start making plans about transferring before I technically had the job because it was getting so late in the summer. I didn’t know if I’d been accepted to the seminary I was applying to until August 21 and school started on August 23. That caused me some worry. I just hoped that since I was at another seminary, had decent grades, and am in good standing with the Region, they’d accept me but they took a long time to make their decisions about August applicants.

So I’m sure you can all see how comforting this scripture was when I was going through this. I’ll read it to you again: “ 6Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” There it is, Paul is telling us not to worry, but give all our worries to God and we’ll have peace. That’s all we have to do. I guess I could end my sermon here, after two pages.

But really, easier said than done, Paul. Am I right? I mean, it looks so easy, but it really is a hard thing to let go of our worries isn't it?

However, if we look at the context of this letter, it's pretty amazing. Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians from prison. This community was praying for him while he was imprisoned and he wrote to them from his jail cell, telling them not to worry. I guess if Paul was able to let go of his worries while he was in prison, I guess I could let go of my worries about whether or not I would get into the seminary.

Sometimes we have to take risks; do things we're not totally sure will work out. New jobs, new schools, getting married, starting families, these are all things that are risky but usually worth it. I know some of our recent high school graduates are probably feeling a little worried this weekend as they move into college dorms and start their orientations. But those college freshman will be having some amazing experiences this year; they will be on their own for the first time, they will learn how to juggle a social life and studying, and they will make friends and have experiences they will remember for the rest of their lives. If they didn't take the risk of going to college, they would always wonder what their lives would have been like.

I took a risk by transferring schools when I only had a year left of my degree. I worried about it for most of the summer before I finally just decided to let what would happen happen and bit by bit the pieces have been falling into place. All the year before, I felt like I needed to be back here with my family, even before mom's cancer came back. So when I learned of this job opportunity in KC I knew that that was the thing that would give me the courage to take this risk. I don't think I would have transferred if I didn't have job opportunity like this one. So I had to wait a long time for the last piece to fall into place, and, even though it was hard, I think I finally got to the point where I wasn't worried about it anymore.

Now I'm here in Atchison because I took that risk two years ago. Everything worked out. Travis and I started dating in September, 2010 and early this year you all agreed to bring us on staff together. Amazing things happen when we stop worrying and trust in God.

Now, I don't always handle things the way Paul told the Philippians to, but I think I'm getting better. It's hard to turn over our worries, but it sure makes it easier to be grateful for the good things that come from the risks we take when we hand over our worries.

Later on in this chapter of the letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Php 4:13). This was my mom's motto during her cancer battle, and it has resonated with me this summer as I adjust to the changes and decisions I've had to make. When we do what we need to do: fill out the paperwork, talk to the right people, and check everything off our to do list, we should hand over our worries because we've done all we can do and know that we can do anything we set our minds to because Christ's love gives us strength.

Our faith in Christ and the love Christ gives us will give us strength for the worrisome times in our lives. We can find peace for the journey when we hand over those struggles and take our worries to God. We're not in this alone. We have a God and a Christ and a church who are right there with us, holding our hands and guiding us through the tough times. Things may not always happen exactly like we hope they will, but we can find peace in the never-ending love of our God.

So I'm going to propose that we should all try to worry less and accept God's peace more because we know that Christ will give us strength to face whatever comes our way.

Please pray with me,

God of hope and peace, help us to worry less and rely on you to guide us through the difficult times in our lives. Thank you for the strength and peace you give us. In your son's name we pray. Amen.