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What's up Traders Point family? How are we doing today? It's good to see you and be with you. I want to welcome everybody joining us all across of our physical locations and those of you joining us online.

And if this happens to be your first time to be with us, we are in week number three of a series of messages that we are calling Let's Talk About It. And the big idea around this is that we all know that we are in the middle of a once-in-a-century global pandemic. How could we forget that? Everybody is talking about it every day.

But there is another pandemic that is going on at the exact same time that we're not talking about nearly enough. And that is simply the mental and emotional health pandemic. It's a very real thing.

According to the Kaiser foundation, one out of two of every of us is wrestling with emotional and mental health. And I want you just to let that sink in for just a minute—one out of two.

That means either you or the person next to you. That means either you are the person or you are married to or are dating the person. That means you or one of your children or one of your friends. It's like half of the room of whatever room you might be in right now.

And here's the thing about mental and emotional health. With those numbers it means that there are thousand and thousands of us wrestling with this, but when you're the one wrestling with mental and emotional health, there is a feeling in which you feel like you are all alone in it. And even if you know that other people are wrestling with it, it oftentimes doesn't feel that way. It feels very isolating. You look around and you feel like everybody else has kind of got their stuff together except for you. And it just further isolates.

Or even worse, you've tried to share what you're going through with someone and they didn't receive it very well. Maybe a well-meaning Christian sort of over spiritualized it and he was just like, "Well, you know, just pray it away." Well, that didn't help.

Maybe you tried to share it with somebody, and he just gave you this deer in the headlights look. He had no idea what you were talking about and he was very uncomfortable and just kind of said, "Well, you know, we all have bad days. You'll snap out of it." And that didn't help either.

And it just further entrenched you in that feeling of isolation and shame, to the point that you said, "I'm just not going to talk about it anymore." And so you're shouldering it all on your own.

Maybe you are a medical worker. And this last year has been brutal for all kinds of reasons. You've been right on the front lines. And maybe you've been worried about putting your family at risk. You've been in hospital rooms where a patient is dying by themselves because family can't be in there. So you're in there and you're on the phone with the family.

And experience after experience after that has taken its toll on you emotionally and mentally, to the point where you need some help but you're afraid to articulate that because you're afraid you might, potentially, lose your medical license. So you don't say anything. And you struggle with it alone.

Maybe you're a school teacher and your job is difficult as it is let alone trying to teach kids in the middle of a pandemic. Maybe you've got some kids back in the classroom physically and some kids are on Zoom and you're wondering if any of them are paying attention. And you're wondering if any of this is getting through.

And it feels like the parents are always upset with you. And your days are really, really long. And you're struggling mentally and emotionally, but when are you going to go get help? Your schedule is so full, so you don't. You just carry it with you alone.

Maybe you've got kids in your house right now and they are struggling with mental and emotional health. And as a parent you wish you could take it from them, but you don't know how. You don't know how to help and you kind of feel like a failure. You feel like you're a crummy mom or a crummy dad. And you're afraid to tell other people about it for fear of what they might think. And you're just sort of stuck.

Can I just say right now that if this is you you are not alone? And we want to talk about it as a church family. We're all struggling with it and so let's talk about it. This should be a safe place. And I know that oftentimes church, in the past, hasn't been—but this should be a safe place for us to share our stress, our sin, and our struggles without shame.

Let's agree with that, if we're going to agree let's agree—so that we might experience some restoration and some hope and some healing that come, obviously: mentally, emotionally, chemically but as well, spiritually, through a reconnection with our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ.

So two weeks ago we kicked off this series by talking about anger. Last weekend Pastor Ryan did an amazing job just walking us through the issue of addiction. The next two weeks we are going to talk about depression and doubt. But today we're going to talk about a big one, we're going to talk about:

Anxiety.

And the statistics on this are just mind-blowing. This all comes from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. So you can look this up on your own. But:

40 Million adults are affected by anxiety disorders each year;

1 in 20 children were found to have anxiety or depression in a single year; and,

only 36.9% of those with anxiety disorders are receiving treatment.

Now think about that for a minute. If that's true, then 63 percent of us who are wrestling with this are not getting the help or the treatment that we need. We're wrestling with it by ourselves in isolation.

The effects of anxiety and depression combined cost the global economy USD 1 trillion every single year.

And the statistics on this have increased by 50 percent from 1990 to 2013. And these statistics are not slowing down. In fact, if anything the pandemic, just like everything else, is accelerating them.

And we want to help. Due to your generosity, as a church we want to be able to provide the resources to help. In fact, I want to encourage you to go to:

[tpcc.org/care](http://tpcc.org/care)

Don't do it now, but later in the week or later today. There is a whole host of resources there that we put together to try to help you or the person you love walk through whatever mental and emotional health you might have, because we want this to be practical. One of the things you'll hear us say all of the time is we want to offer health and hope in the name of Jesus Christ.

Let me just say this. Don't go at this alone. Don't go at this alone. You are not alone. There are a whole bunch of others wrestling with this. In fact, listen to this wisdom that is found in Ecclesiastes, chapter 4, verses 9 – 10. It says:

"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble."

You want to know one of the reasons why this past year has been so difficult on us—and there are all kinds of reasons for that—but one of the general reasons that every single one of us, me included, have fallen in some way... We've fallen in our issues. We've fallen in confusion and disorientation and stress. We've fallen into our fears and our anxieties, depression, and doubts. And because we are isolated from one another, there hasn't been anybody there to help us.

Just think about the dominant message that has been and is being communicated around our nation and around the world right now during this pandemic. Here is the dominant message: Stay away from each other.

And I'm not saying that that's not needed. I am saying that there are some repercussions from that. In fact, pop quiz. I bet you can finish these statements with me. At all of our campuses and online just finish these sentences:

Everywhere you go, practice six feet of social distancing.

Yeah, we've got that curled into our head.

If you are in a public space, you must wear a mask.

If you test positive or have been near someone else who was, you must self-isolate or quarantine.

Now, listen. As a result our issues have gotten magnified because we're carrying around all of these heavy emotional burdens alone—isolated.

Now, please hear what I'm saying and what I'm not saying. I do not want you to misunderstand me. I am not saying that those public health measures weren't or aren't needed. What I am saying is that the things that we are doing to protect our physical bodies from a virus are taking a toll on us mentally and emotionally—I am saying that.

And since you are a whole person, meaning you cannot separate your physical well-being from your emotional well-being, from your mental well-being, from your spiritual well-being—if one of them is hurting, all of them are hurting.

One of my primary concerns... Obviously, I'm concerned about your physical, mental, and emotional health. I'm not a doctor. I'm a pastor, which means that I'm really, really concerned about your spiritual health.

And can I just say that this pandemic has blown me away in so many ways? And one of those is that if you would have told me 18 months ago what we would have gone through as a church, I would have thought that we were done. It would have been enough to fold us.

So, this has taught me... God is like, "Hey, Aaron. Church is way more resilient than you think." We have navigated this in a way that I would never thought that we could.

Yet, at the same time I also know that it has taken a toll on us. I read a statistic this last week that said one out of five Christ followers, people who are already convinced, they are already in, they are following Jesus—one out of five Christ followers dropped out of church altogether

in 2020. Meaning not only do they stop showing up physically, they stopped showing up digitally as well.

I've talked to a number of them in our church. And they mean well, and they still believe in Jesus and all of that—no judgment there. It's just that they forgot what day it was, online is not their thing, they are wrestling with depression, they've fallen into their addictions and so they just sort of backed away from the table.

And I just want to take this opportunity, and I'm going to continue to do this in the next few months, to just encourage you to re-engage and be on mission, not because we need you to show up, but because I want what God wants for your life. I want you to experience it to the fullest.

This last week I was on the phone with my therapist/leadership coach/friend. He's all three of those. And he's a great guy. He lives in Chicago and we're on the phone, we have a phone conversation scheduled every two or three weeks, and he asked me this question that I didn't quite, fully—I didn't answer it adequately. Let's just say it that way.

He said, "Hey, Aaron, how are you feeling?" And I was like, "Oh, fine." And he was like, "No, that's not a real answer. Let me ask that again. How are you feeling?"

"Oh, good." He's like, "That's not a good answer."

I don't know how many of you are like me, you're not very good about being in touch with how you are doing emotionally. Any of you like me? "Aaron, what are you feeling right now, what are your emotions?"

"I don't know."

And so he said, "Hey, what I'm going to do is I'm going to send you a list of 21 emotional needs and I want you to order off of the menu. I want you to just look at all of those needs and just assign one to what you need today. How are you feeling and what you need?"

And then he said this, "Every single day at some point in during the day I want you to just stop and I want you to ask yourself, 'How am I feeling and what do I need.' And if you don't know what it is, order off of the menu." And he said, "If you go two or three days without knowing what to say or what you need, you need to call me so that we can talk about it."

Can I just very lovingly pass that same kind of counsel on to you whoever you are and wherever you may be? Can I just look right into the camera—I'm talking to you. I'm not talking to your spouse, I'm not talking to your neighbor, I'm talking to you. How are you doing and what do you need: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually?

And I want to encourage you during this time—I really do believe that we are entering into a new day. I'm sort of a future-type thinker, I'm future oriented and that's what's been difficult about the pandemic, it's that I've always been kind of thinking about the future, not as present today. I really do believe that we are emerging into a new day.

I want to encourage you to just to stay engaged and locked in with us and attentive to what God wants to say to you. So here's what I want to say. Our church right now is 100 percent physical and 100 percent digital. And if you're joining us physically or if you're joining us digitally, both of those are viable options. That's kind of the world we live in. Sometimes I go into Lowes to buy the part, sometimes I'll order it online.

And I know that as a church we've been both for quite a while—we're just way more intentional about the digital side. But let me say this. If you're staying digital, and I want you to hear my heart, pastorally, if you're on digital because you're not comfortable coming back, because you're at high risk, or because you're caring for someone who is—we totally get that, we support you, we love you. Traders Point Online will be here forever.

If you are staying online, because it's convenient or because you've gotten a little bit lazy, or because it's just going on in the background and maybe your family is making breakfast and the dog and the cat are chasing each other around the living room and the kids are playing Nintendo Switch Dock in the corner and this is just background noise, can I just very lovingly encourage you to dial back in?

Maybe you need to show back up physically at some point. We've taken all of the precautions so that you're physically as safe as you can be at one of our campuses.

But regardless of whether it's physical or digital, I want you to be attentive to the Spirit of God and I want you engaged and involved. What does that mean? Well, that means serving. That means giving. That means being involved in a group. That means being on mission and sharing what God is doing in and through your life and through the life of this local church.

Something that may surprise you is that people in the Bible, they really wrestled with anxiety and depression. And that may be brand new information to you because there is a tendency to think that if you were in the Bible you must have been a super spiritual super hero, but that's not the case. They were very real people like you and me.

In fact, I want to point you to a book of the Bible in which a prophet named Jeremiah just airs out all of the anxiety that he was wrestling with. Look at Lamentations, chapter 3, verses 2 through 4. Jeremiah says:

“He has led me into darkness, shutting out all light. He has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long. He has made my skin and flesh grow old.”

What's he saying? He's saying anxiety—when you are in the pit that feels like darkness. And it can begin to feel like. “Maybe God is doing this to me. Maybe God is punishing me for some

reason by sending anxiety into my life. And it feels relentless. Like wave after wave after wave—there is no relief. When is it going to end? And every time I look in the mirror, it just feels like this is aging me.”

That’s what Jeremiah is saying. Maybe you can relate to that. And he says in verse 5:

“He has besieged and surrounded me with anguish and distress.”

Meaning, when you’re in the middle of it you feel surrounded. You feel like the walls are closing in and it’s suffocating. On down in verses 17 and 18 it says:

“Peace has been stripped away, and I have forgotten what prosperity is. I cry out,” now notice. This is in quotes. Now, Jeremiah is saying all of it, but this next sentence is in quotes ““My splendor is gone! Everything I had hoped for from the Lord is lost!””

In other words, he’s saying, “All my hope is gone.” And that last sentence in quotes signifies that this was a thought that Jeremiah was spinning on over and over and over again in his mind. And it was going nowhere.

In fact, psychologists have a term for this very thing. They call it ruminating. And it’s the idea that toxic self-talk kind of gets into our head and we spin on it, we sort of fume about it, we’re ruminating on it and it’s not going anywhere. It’s kind of like the clothes in a dryer. They sit there and spin and spin and spin. That’s what happens to our thoughts. We’re just rehearsing the negative.

Now, how this begins is in a very legitimate way. In fact, this begins with what we might call an understandable worry. Now, one of the things I never really had explained to me is how worry and anxiety are different from one another and how they relate to one another.

We’re going to look at a passage here in a minute that I think has been misunderstood and misapplied by a lot of people and this is kind of where we get this.

But I kind of grew up thinking that all worry was bad, and you should never worry, “Hey don’t worry about that. That’s a bad thing to do.” But I never really knew why or what to do with it. And not all worry is bad. It might be surprising for you to hear me say that God actually created worry within your amygdala, we talked about that a couple of weeks ago, that kind of sends messages to your central nervous system. And initially it is not a bad thing.

It’s kind of like, several years ago when our family decided that we were going to make a conscious effort to begin eating healthier and I heard something that I’d never heard before. Not all fat is bad fat. Some fat is good fat. Did you know that? I had no idea. I heard that for the first time. I didn’t believe it at first. I thought all fat is bad fat, yucky bad fat. No, you actually need some fat in your diet in order to be healthy.

And I would say that not all worry is bad worry. It's this idea that it triggers flight or fight. It's this idea that keeps you alive. You're anticipating or sensing danger or a threat. I want my kids to have a healthy worry of creepy strangers and dangerous intersections. I just don't want them to live there.

See, that's the thing. Worry is something that can be good for us, but it's kind like a hotel room. A hotel room is good to check into temporarily, not good to move into.

So what happens is when we stay with worry, we ruminate on it, and we move in there and it begins to shape neurological pathways. A new pathway gets carved and if you stay there long enough it will turn into crippling or chronic anxiety.

I want you to think about it this way. Worry takes place in your brain. Anxiety gets felt in your body. Worry is something that is specific.

Let me give you an example of this. You're on the way to the airport and you've got to catch a flight and you get caught in traffic and you get worried that you might miss your flight. That is a very understandable, very legitimate worry.

But let's say you get to the airport on time, you get into your seat, you buckle up and you made it, but you're still worried. That's anxiety. Anxiety is vague. You can't quite fully put your finger on it and so it's just this sense that travels from your head to your body and your constantly in the flight or fight mode.

We can say it this way. Anxiety is unchecked worry that makes its way from your head to your heart.

And this is not a theoretical for me. This is very real. I've experienced this. In November of 2018 I did a message series on anxiety called On Edge. And if you were part of our church maybe you remember that series.

I did all kinds of research. I did all kinds of study on it because I knew it was a big, big issue and I knew that it was going to be a delicate subject. So I spent probably twice the amount on it than I do a normal message.

And within that series I shared with our whole church family about a season of anxiety and depression that I walked through, back in 2004, the middle part of 2004 to the beginning of 2006. And here's the problem with that illustration. It was far enough in my rear view that it sort of gave the impression like, "I dealt with that a long time ago, but I'm like way past it."

And I didn't anticipate the fact that I would go through another season of it in 2020. And to be honest with you, I still don't know if I'm fully out of it. The pandemic last spring turned all of our worlds upside down. It was hard on every single one of us, just in some different ways. And it was definitely hard on... I don't say this to make you feel sorry for me, but just to say, "I get it."



I remember back in the spring when all of this happened, and it was surreal to me that we couldn't get together physically. As a pastor I was really, really struggling. And I would say from March all the way through August it was really, really dark and it was disorienting.

And as I look back on it, I would say that some of my strengths came to the surface and some of my weaknesses got unmasked. And you may not have been able to see them, but my team saw them, and my wife saw them. And it was a heart-check moment.

What you need to understand about me, if any of you are familiar with the Enneagram, I'm a 3, lean 2, which means that I'm an achiever who wants to help people. And the way in which I get fulfillment and the way in which my leadership compass gets calibrated is by doing what I'm doing right now—standing up on this stage and preaching and teaching the word of God.

Honestly, this is what I believe that God put me on the planet to do and when I do it, I feel this sense of fulfillment from God and I feel like I'm able to help the most.

And when I'm up here I'm not imagining all of you naked—aren't you glad for that? I'm not looking over your heads, I'm looking at you—those of you who are in the room. And, if you're watching from another campus or online, I'm imagining you.

And those of you in the room, your body language—I can sense all of it. It is a weird sense. If I sat together with you in a booth at a restaurant, I would have no idea what you're feeling. Get in a room like this, I can feel everybody's body language, I can feel all of your energy. So when I feel like I'm losing you, I'll shift, and I'll change the direction to try to grab you. That's just part of how God has wired me up.

When we couldn't meet physically, I felt like the achiever in me and the helper in me went dark. And I didn't feel useful to anybody. I hate preaching into a camera all alone. And month after month of that I would be like...

I'll just let you know that we would come here on Friday morning, we would record the whole service, and I'd be in a room, mostly by myself, and I preached directly to a camera. I would get done and I couldn't wait to get out to my car in the parking lot, because as soon as I would get into the truck, I would shut the door and just weep for weeks.

And I would come home, and my wife would meet me at the door, and she knew it was hard. And more than once I looked at her and I said, "Honey, if this is what ministry is for the rest of my life, I'm out. I'll go sell instruments or something. I can't do it."

So it was that disorientation and then we got to the end of May and the beginning of June. Remember that time? There was all of this social unrest and there was all of this fighting and all the talks of racism. And I knew that my responsibility as your pastor is to not reflect what the culture is sending us but to teach what God's word has to say about a very real issue. And the Bible has a lot to say about racism.

So I was preparing to preach on that very touchy subject, I knew that I was going to take a lot of shots for it. And I got more criticism during that first week of June than I've ever experienced in my entire time at Traders Point.

So because we weren't able to meet physically, it felt like I was blindfolded, and I was just getting punched. And I didn't know where to go or how to address it or how to help people and I felt misunderstood, but I couldn't meet physically with anybody.

And that week my grandma died, and it just sent everything going on edge. My mom called me. It was a Tuesday morning and she said, "Grandma just died. We need you to get back to Joplin because we need you to speak at her funeral on Friday."

And I had to preach on racism that week. So I knew that I needed to be the one, I couldn't just pass this one off to Ryan, I was like, "No, the church needs to hear from me."

So what that meant was that I had to write one of the most challenging sermons I've ever had to write in a day. Usually it takes me three days. I had to write it in a day, and I had to come into this room and preach it to a camera on a Wednesday morning, alone, and then leave and go out of town and not know how it might land on you.

And I lost it on that Tuesday. I fell face down on the ground and I cried all day long. And I called one of our elders and I said, "I really need you. Can you get over here?" And he didn't ask any questions. He dropped everything and he drove over to my house. We were sitting on my front porch and he just walked up, and he sat down next to me and he just let me emotionally throw up all over him. He just let me cry and he cried with me.

Can I just say for those of you who have a loved one who is going through emotional and mental health struggles that the more severe the struggle the less you need to say. You don't need to try to fix it. You don't need to try to talk them out of it. You just need to be with and let them cry and cry with them.

Here's what was happening to me during that time. I had some very specific worries and concerns that stayed wide open during that whole time and they eventually morphed into this chronic feeling of anxiety. It was like an accelerator that was stuck wide open.

See, with worry you can take some sort of action to mitigate it. But with anxiety you cannot fight it because it's a ghost. It's like trying to box with a shadow. You can never land a punch because it's not specific enough for you to deal with.

So how do we address some of this ongoing, crippling, maybe chronic anxiety in our lives? One of the things that I want you to know, we just need to take this off of the table, you will never hear me say, "Well, you just pray it away. Just be more spiritual." You'll never hear me

say that. And you'll never see me just look at you and say, "Well, you don't want to worry do you?"

"No, I don't want to worry."

"Well, stop it."

I'm never going to do that, alright? But, at the same time, and I encourage you to go to [tpcc.org/care](http://tpcc.org/care), you might need some help, some medication, and some treatment. But there are also some truths in God's word that—listen to me—just because they are mistaught, misunderstood, or misapplied doesn't mean that they are not true.

And I want to go to a passage of Scripture out of Philippians that oftentimes gets misunderstood and mis-applied, so you hear it and you're going to want to go, "I've heard that before. That's over-simplifying or over-spiritualizing it." Listen to it again. Let it land freshly upon you. It says, in Philippians, chapter 4, verse 6:

"Don't worry about anything;" this is where some of us begin to tune it out, "Well, that's impossible, I can't help it. You don't understand." Listen. Just relax. Let it land on you. He says, "This is your Heavenly Father. Don't worry about anything, "instead, pray about everything."

Now how this has been misunderstood, mistaught, and misapplied is that you hear this, "Don't worry. That's bad. Instead pray it away." That's not what he is saying. He's not saying that you should never have a worry. He's saying, "When a worry enters your mind, don't let it travel to your heart, don't let it dwell there, don't move into hotel worry, you can actually re-direct it, you can do something with it." And it gets very, very practical with what you and I can do.

See:

Worry is you talking to yourself about your problems.

And then you just stay there. And you just ruminate on them. It's the spinning that Jeremiah was doing in Lamentations. It's all of the what ifs, rehearsing the worst-case scenarios in your mind. It's you spending enormous amounts of emotional energy on things that might never happen. It is a down-payment on a problem you might never have.

Somebody once said this, "Worry is an internal false prophet that prophesizes a hopeless future of doom."

So why do we do it? Well I can't answer for you, but I can answer for me. And, by the way, I'm really good at worry. Right behind sarcasm it's my next, best spiritual gift. I'm really, really good at worry. I can tell you this. The reason why I worry is because I feel like things are out of my control, and I'm a bit of a control freak, so worry feels like I'm controlling something. And it's all false. I'm not controlling anything.

Can I say this? Worry is a mental habit. And if it's a mental habit you can re-train yourself. You can do something with it. See, here's the lie that many of us believe self-consciously:

If I worry today, I'll have peace tomorrow.

But you won't. Jesus, being the master teacher that he was, he knew this and one time when he was addressing a group of his fearful followers, he said this in Matthew, chapter 6,

"Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?"

The answer is no. But you stay in the head space long enough the only thing your worry will change is you. It will make you miserable. I have never looked back on a season of worry after I was through what ever it was that I was worried about and said, "Man, I'm really, really glad that I spent all of that emotional energy worrying. It was totally worth it."

Worry doesn't do anything for you. Worry can't make you prettier or more handsome. Worry can't make you stronger or richer. Worry can't make you shorter or taller. Worry cannot lengthen your life, although it can shorten it. It cannot change your past or control the future. All it does is make today miserable.

Charles Spurgeon one time repeated this truth. He said, "Worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrows, it only empties today of its strength."

I mean, think about it. If you worry about something you can't change, that's useless. If you're worried about something you can change, well that's silly. Take some action and maybe change it.

Listen. I'm not saying you should pray it away or just stop it. I am saying that we need to re-direct our worries. And Paul gives us some very practical ways to do this. It's this decision that you make, whether it's on your own or whether through professional help, treatment, or medication. "I'm no longer going to ruminate on this. I'm no longer going to spin on this, because it's leading me to nowhere good. I might have a worry—very legitimate. I am not going to be worried."

How do we do this? We get super practical, verses 6 and 7:

"Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done." That is all that he says there. And then he says, "Then you will experience," that's something that you feel, you'll experience "God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand."

See, that's part of the problem. We want to understand it. And he says that we have peace that surpasses understanding. In other words, it won't make any sense to you given the circumstances of your life.

And there is so much that is packed into those three sentences that is so refreshing if you really stop to listen, because it's all relational. It's not transactional. And oftentimes I want a transactional God. I want to say, "God, this is the issue that I have, take it away." God, most of the time, will not do that. He wants to be relational.

And he says, quite simply, "Thank God for all that he had done. Tell him what you need." He never once said, "Pray to be delivered from." Thank him for what he's done. Tell him what you need. And then you'll experience this peace.

You know I used to think for the longest time that life was either you have good days or bad days. You had mountain top experiences or valleys. And I'm just learning that it's just not that cut and dry. The older I get, very rarely... I might be in a season that is good, but there is always some sort of struggle. And what I'm learning is that very rarely is there a mountaintop and a valley.

So often I'll wait until I get on the mountaintop and then I'll thank God for what he did delivering me from the valley. But I find that I'm never thanking him because I'm never fully out of the valley.

Instead of a mountaintop or a valley, life is more like a set of railroad tracks. You get the good and you get the bad. You get the victories, and you get the struggles running side by side, which means that God wants to be with you all of the time through them. And there is always something you can thank God for, even in the darkest of days.

Listen. We do not get to choose what we are going through. What we do get to choose is what we'll think about. And what we think about will determine our level of peace. He says it in verse 7:

"His peace," the peace that God gives you—this is really interesting how he phrases it, "will guard," it doesn't say he'll deliver you, it will guard, "your hearts and minds," your worries and your anxieties, "as you live in Christ Jesus."

God wants to guard your heart and your mind with peace. The question that we have to ask is, "Is my mind already completely filled with comparisons, conflicts, criticisms, and complaints? And if so then I don't have any place to put God's peace."

And Paul goes on and says, "Here's the eight-question test," verses 8 and 9:

"And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts," in other words, this is something you're going to have to do intentionally. Fix your thoughts "on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

“Keep,” in other words, stay consistent, “putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing.” Here’s the promise, and it is a promise, “Then the God of peace will be with you.”

This is so practical. He didn’t say, “God will deliver you,” at least initially. This is fascinating. Paul is no dummy. He is picking his words very intentionally: guard instead of deliver; hearts and minds; worries and anxieties. God will be with you in the midst of all of this.

He is telling us right here to think about what we think about. And that’s where all of this begins. You’ve got to think about what you think about. Now, I promise you that you can do this. And I know that you can do it because our thought life is a mental habit.

And if you have ever had to train a toddler, if you’ve ever been potty training or you’ve got to train a puppy, try to housebreak a puppy—any of you had to do that? Any of you in the middle of doing that right now? You’ve got a toddler at home and you’re trying to potty train, and a puppy trying to housetrain—if you’re doing that, you can do this with your thoughts.

Here’s the thing. When you’re in the middle—it takes a while and just when you think you are making progress you turn around and there is a pile of poop right there in the living room and the puppy even made a mess over there, alright. And what do you do? Do you just throw up your hands and say, “This will never change.”? No, you very patiently clean up the mess and then you go, and you do some retraining.

And Paul says this is the same thing when it comes to our thoughts. When you have a thought that just makes a mess in your head, clean it up, retrain your thinking. And here’s how you do it—through this eight-question test. You think to yourself:

is this true?

Is this honorable?

Is this right?

Is this pure?

Is this lovely?

Is this admirable?

Is this excellent?

Is it worthy of praise?

Now this is the eight-question test. I'd encourage you to put all of this on a piece of paper and tape it above your computer screen, or put it on your mirror. And every day when a thought comes into your mind, then you run it against the grid of this test. And if it isn't true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or worthy of praise—it's out! You just kick it out. You say, "You're not staying here any longer."

Is anyone like, "Well, that's really easy for you..." Listen to me. You've got to be so intentional about this. If you're failing at this and the first thing that you're doing in the morning is picking up your phone and looking at the news feeds or social media and one of the last things that you're doing at night before you go to bed is looking at newsfeeds and social media, then there is no room for the thoughts of peace that God wants to put into your mind.

You want to know what is more infectious than the Corona virus? Anxiety. It passes more efficiently within groups of people. And all studies point to the fact that the more social media intake you have, it only increases loneliness, depression, and anxiety.

Meaning you're always hitting that refresh button, but never refreshed. You're always scrolling through your feed, never being fed because you're filling your minds...

Listen. I'm not against the news media. I know we have a number of members of the news media in our church and they are really, really good people. But I do know that the news media is a business, which means that they need viewership clicks.

And one of the best ways to get viewership clicks is fear. This is why hope is not in the headlines. And even if there is some good news, they lace it with something that's to be afraid of. I saw it this last week. It was like, "Cases, hospitalizations, and death rates are plummeting. Experts are still very concerned about the spring." And I'm like, "Come on, man." We've got to be intentional about how much intake is happening because our minds and our nervous systems are containers that can only hold so much.

So, somebody explained it to me this way recently. I thought it was really, really helpful. And I thought I would pass this on to you as well. I want you to think about our minds, our nervous systems, as a container and there is only so many things that we can hold. And when our minds get filled up to a certain extent, and they overflow, that's where anxiety comes from. And when your mind is constantly overflowing, that stuck accelerator, it's just chronic anxiety.

One of the things that we all have to really do a good job of being intentional about is to recognize this idea of personal responsibility, what goes in the "I can" and faith, what goes in the "God can". And when we get these mixed up, that's a recipe for anxiety.

Sometimes Christians will over-spiritualize things. And sometimes we under-spiritualize things. And a healthy Christ follower knows what God can do and what he can do.

So let me give you a couple of examples of this. Maybe I'm talking to somebody and he says, "I'm really, really struggling with financial health. And we've got a lot of bills coming up." And

I'm like, "Man, what are you doing?" And he's like, "Well, I'm really praying. I'm asking God to help me win the lottery or maybe that my rich uncle will remember me in his will."

"Okay. Well, that's one way to do it. Or you could develop a budget. That's something that you can do, tangibly. It won't get you out of it immediately, but you can develop a budget."

"Well I'm really, really praying that God would give me a job. My perfect dream job has just come about and that they would call me and offer me six figures."

"Okay. Or you could work on your resume. That's something that can go in the 'I can'."

I was talking to a young man recently and he was just like, "Oh, man. I'm just praying that God would bring the right girl into my life. I really want to be married."

And I was like, "Man, that's fantastic. Are you working on your character? Are you working on the kind of person who somebody else could marry, rather than just looking for the one?"

And he was like, "Well, yeah. I'm just kind of praying that God would bring her into my life."

"Well, why don't you take a shower? Let's start there. Girls think showers are sexy, alright? Let's do that."

So, we get this confused. Some of us, we spend all of this time like worry, worry, worry that God is going to provide. Listen. You've worked on your resume, you've got a great job, and you've developed a budget and you're still worried about money.

There are only so many things that you can control. You can't control the economy. And you cannot control your boss's decisions. Provision is God's deal. And when you try to over-own provision, you're trying to put it into the "I can" container and there's no room for it. It doesn't fit. And it's anxiety.

Let me give you another one. Many of us love our kids so, so much. We want the best for them. But we over reach and we're constantly hovering, we're constantly trying to protect them from every little thing to the point that it is stunting their growth in every way.

Listen. Protection is God's deal. And when you try to over own that and you're putting it in the "I can" container it doesn't fit. It overflows. And the result is anxiety. We've got to figure out what it is that God owns and what it is that I own, put it in the can and then trust him in faith, but also take personal responsibility.

The psalmist says it this way in Psalm, chapter 42, verse 5. He says:

"Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad?" In other words, these are the mental thoughts that he's having. And then he answers it. He says, "I will put my hope in God!"



Do you know what he just did right there? He took all of his worries and concerns and said, "I'm going to put what is in the "God can" and leave it there. And I'm going to put what is in the "I can" and leave it there. I'm going to sleep at night. I'm going to put my hope in God.

One of the things that you've often heard me say from up front is that one of the most common commands in God's world is this command:

Fear not.

It is mentioned over and over and over again. And you hear that and it kind of sounds like maybe God is yelling at you, "Fear not! Just stop it!" But almost always within the orbit of fear not, when it is mentioned in God's word, is:

I am with you.

It's a promise. He says, "Don't fear." Why? Because he'll take all of your problems away or because nothing bad will happen? No. "Bad things are going to happen, but I am with you."

When my oldest daughter, Campbell, was six years old, she's 16 now, but when she was six our family went to Disney and she loves roller coasters and anything scary. That's kind of like her deal.

And she wanted to ride a haunted mansion ride. And I was a little apprehensive. I was like, "Honey, it's a little intense. Are you sure you know what you are doing?" And she was so confident. And she was like, "Daddy, I am everything about that ride and I'm totally fine with it and I want to go." I was like, "Alright."

She insisted. So we go and we get in line and we're about half-way through the line to where there's crowds of people in front of us, crowds of people behind us. So we're sort of committed at that point. And she started ruminating. I could see it. The shift from confidence to sort of uncertainty began to take place, it was all over her face.

She's looking around. She's looking at the graveyard and all of the creepy music was making sounds and screams were coming from inside and she starts ruminating. And she's like, "Daddy, we're going to be okay, right? Daddy, this is all fake, right? Daddy, I know that this is all make believe."

And she was just trying to convince herself. And I kept answering her, "Yeah, honey. It's all make believe. It's just for entertainment." But she just kept ruminating. And it got worse and worse and worse the closer we got to getting in the little train.

By the time we'd gotten up to the train I kind of looked at her and I said, "Honey, are you sure? There's the chicken door, right there. We can go." And she was like, "No, Daddy. We can do it." But there was this look of uncertainty all over her face.

We got on the little train and we sat down, and we got locked in and right as it started to move, she melted down. She started bawling and yelling. She was like, "Daddy, I don't want to be on this. Get me off." And everything within me, as her dad, wanted to pull the little emergency rope, that wasn't there, to stop the train and get her off. But it was too late.

And the only thing that I could do as her father was, I just wrapped my arms around her. She buried her little face into my chest, crying. And I just wrapped my arms around her. And I got really close to her ear and I just kept saying over and over again, "I am right here with you. I'm right here. I'm right here." I wanted to get her off of the train so badly, but I knew I couldn't do that.

We finally got to the end of the ride and I thought she might calm down when she got off of the ride, but she didn't. She just got worse. And all of the way out onto the little road she was just crying. And I couldn't console her. All I could do right in that moment was pick up my baby girl, wrap my arms around her real tight, and I just sat there in the middle of Main Street, Disney rocking her, and I just said, "I'm right here. I'm right here."

I don't like the fact that she went through that pain. But it's honestly one of my favorite moments at Disney, because I got to be really close to my daughter. Can I just say that you have a Heavenly Daddy right now who has wrapped his arms around you? And he's saying, "I know it hurts. I know it's painful. I'm right here with you."

He doesn't relish your pain one bit, but I bet you he loves the intimacy when you're willing to just throw open your arms into the arms of your Heavenly Father. Don't push away from him.

Those of you who are parents, you have little kids and you're trying to help them, and they don't think you are trying to help them, and they push away—doesn't it hurt? God feels that same thing when you push away from your faith in the midst of incredible pain, which some of you are doing. God says, "I am right here."

Jeremiah comes to this conclusion. In verses 21 to 24. After he's aired out all of his anxiety and he says:

"Yet I still dare to hope," It's a risk. But I'm going to dare to hope, "When I remember this:" in his mind, "The faithful love of the Lord never ends. His mercies never cease. Great is thy faithfulness. His mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself," a new narrative, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!"

And if you cannot bring yourself to clap right now, I get it. Because anxiety feels like darkness. And you know that not all dark rooms are the same. A pit is dark. You know what else is dark? A tunnel—and a tunnel is way more hopeful than a pit.

When you are in a pit you don't know where to go, you just keep bumping into walls, you can't get out. But a tunnel, it's dark but there's a way out. You can put one foot in front of the other.

And right now, some of you need to just invite your Heavenly Daddy into your life and he will say, "I promise I am with you and I will walk you out of this tunnel of despair. I will bring healing into your life. And healing doesn't happen all at once. It's a process.

It's like if you break an arm. You want God to heal it and he will, but you don't say, "Hey, God. Take my broken arm away." It's like, "No, I heal it." And the same thing is true with mental and emotional struggles. The same thing is true with anxiety. He may not take it away at the snap of a finger, he could, he can, he has the power to, but chances are he'll heal you from it and that is a process.

I just want to invite you to get the help and the hope that you need. And today I want to invite you to start with Jesus and your Heavenly Father and just surrender yourself. If you are ready to take the next step in your spiritual journey, you can text the word Jesus to 87221 wherever you may be, whether you are in Indy or around the world somewhere. Our team will follow-up with you to help you take those next steps, whatever they are.

Maybe you just need to put your faith in Jesus for the very first time. Maybe some of you need to get into a group. Maybe some of you need to be baptized.

Maybe some of you just need to go, "Man, over the last year, I'm one of those people who just dropped away and I'm ready to pull myself back up to the table again and be involved in the mission of God and what it is that he has for me today."

So let's pray.

Father, we come to you right now and I thank you that your word is so practical and so real. This isn't just about preparing us for heaven one day when we die, but it's about how to engage in abundant life here in an imperfect, broken, messed up, divided world.

And, God, so many of us are hurting. So many of us are struggling and we've been struggling alone. Maybe it's time we step out and we raise up our hand and we say, "I need some help. I can't do this anymore."

And as a church family, may we come around them with compassion and empathy and with a spirit that says, "Yeah, me too. I know what that's like. But you don't have to stay there. There is a God who can meet you in the middle of your sin struggle, your stress struggle, your anxiety struggle. He can walk you through it and out of it."

So, Father, today I pray that you would meet them wherever they are in the room or through the screen and that your Spirit would do a heart-shaping work in their lives right now, today.

And that today would signify the beginning of a new day in the life of our people and the life of our nation and the life of our world. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.