

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

DON'T OVERTHINK IT | LETTERS FROM MY FUTURE SELF

AARON BROCKETT | JANUARY 8, 2023

Alright, alright. So good to back with everybody. I hope you've had a great break. And I want to wish you a happy New Year and just say hello to everybody gathered across all of our locations and online.

Before we get going today there is something I want to make you aware of and to celebrate. We were able, over the Christmas break, to close on a facility on the northeast side of Indy that will be, Lord willing, the future home of our Northeast campus one day. So, we're just super excited about that and I want to celebrate it.

I want to ask you to be praying. Some of you may be aware of this, some of you may not—we launched our Northeast campus about two seconds before COVID and then we had to make the painful decision to stop it. Now we are trying to restart it. And we've had a number of obstacles and challenges along the way.

But we believe that God desires us to start a location on the northeast side for all kinds of reasons. This is a huge milestone for that to happen. So I just want to ask you to be praying about that campus as things begin to come together. This is a big one that we want to celebrate.

And I just want to thank you guys for your ongoing generosity that makes things like this possible. When something pops up we are able to pull the trigger on it. So thank you for that.

And man, if you are just now joining us, maybe you've been away from church for a while and you've come back at the beginning of the new year, we are kicking off a three-week series of messages to begin this year called *Letters To My Future Self*.

And really, the idea behind this is that if you had the opportunity to go back in time or to maybe write a letter to a version of yourself in the past, what would you say? What kind of encouragement? What kind of advice would you offer? What kind of warnings.

Maybe you would be like, "Man, stay out of that relationship. I know he's cute, but stay out of that relationship." "I know she's drop dead gorgeous, but she's trouble. Just avoid that." Maybe you would be like, "Hey, don't get in the car. Don't get in the car. That is going to change your life forever."

I don't know about you, but I wish I could go back in time and say, "Hey, Aaron. Put two of your pennies together and invest in the stock with the name of a fruit—just Apple. I'm



not going to explain it. Just put it all in Apple. I wish that I could offer myself some counsel in that area.

Now, I've been thinking about this over the last several weeks. And I thought, "You know what? If I could go back in time, what were some things that I would advise myself of, in the past? I just came up with a few. And I'm actually going to share a few of these every week of this series. But here's one I would most definitely say to my younger self:

"Dear Aaron,

One afternoon in the 5th grade you're going to get so excited about the extra ten minutes of recess that you received that you will run outside, pick up a rock, and without thinking throw it straight up in the air. **Please do not do this** as it will land on top of your friend's head, splitting it wide open. He would eventually be okay, but you will spend the rest of that recess and every other recess that week in detention. And actually, he will never let you forget it. So, Aaron. Don't do that.

Here's the next one. I'm just going to get really vulnerable with you. That's just the kind of church we are. Alright?

"Dear Aaron,

You are going to eat way too many hot dogs and s'mores on the 4th of July celebration when you are in the 7th grade. The next morning you will get up early to go play golf with your dad and your uncle and your cousin. **Please bring a change of underwear and shorts** (that's how bad it was), trust me, you will need them."

Every swing, man, I caught a whiff. It was bad. Alright, that is it. That's it. I won't say anything more.

Here's another one. I'll get a little more serious:

"Dear Aaron,

When you are in your mid 20s you are going to put an inordinate amount of pressure on yourself, to be, or at least appear to be, successful. Failure is your greatest fear."

Still is, by the way.

"Please don't over think it. God is at work in your life and your greatest accomplishments are not necessarily what you do but who you serve. Be faithful, work hard, laugh often, invest in your marriage, your kids, your friendships. Stay close to Jesus and leave the results to Him. Don't forget to have fun doing what you're doing because it is going to go by much faster than you think."

You know, if you had the opportunity to sit down and just pen a letter to yourself, in the past, what would you say? What kind of advice and counsel would you give?

What about this? What are some of the things that God has been teaching you in your faith journey with Him that you would like to share with your past self? What are some things that you have learned in His Word that you would like to pass on to save you some heartache?

Now let's take that and flip it. What if tomorrow you got a strangely marked letter in the mail and the handwriting was really familiar? It was from you. Your future self advising you about some things in your current life? What would you say to yourself?

These next three weeks together is really a deeply personal series for me because really what I did to kind of lay out this series was to say, "What are three things I think my future self would say to me now?" And that's this series.

So next week we're going to talk about financial peace and stewardship and decisions, just the anxiety that I've experienced around finances. What does the Bible have to say about that? And then we're going to talk about forgiveness, forgiving other people. Maybe even when they don't deserve it or ask for it or are no longer around. Not necessarily to relieve their consciences, but to release you from the bitterness of your own heart.

Today, what we're going to start with... I think if I were to write myself a letter, get a letter from my future self, it would just simply say:

"Dear Aaron,

Don't overthink it. You are in your head way too much."

And I'm guessing that I am not alone when I say that. I am often guilty of overthinking things: taking myself too seriously, letting criticism get too much of me. I think catastrophic, worst-case scenarios. I'm afraid, at times, of messing up or missing out.

And as we begin a brand-new year, I think this is just a good time for all of us to be reminded that the battle is won or lost largely in our minds. There is a huge battle taking place right now in the minds of men, women, and children everywhere. You know this to be true and I know this to be true.

Right now I think there are a number of factors around this. And obviously we've just come through a massive global crisis that comes around about every century or so. That's part of it. But that's not all of it. I think that just revealed some of the challenges with mental health that many of us have been experiencing.

I think another factor is that we have access to more information at our fingertips than any other generation in the history of the world. That's astounding. And we don't have processors fast enough to process all of the information that is coming in. So at some point we just feel overwhelmed.

For example, if this stick figure right here kind of represents you and the sphere around it represents your world, right now, here in 2023, chances are that there are a number of stressors or factors that you're wrestling with in your life.

And maybe you would put some of those under the word:

TROUBLES:

Maybe you've experienced a loss of some kind, unexpected circumstances, or worry about the next global crisis.

Maybe it's:

TRANSITION:

Maybe you've just recently moved, or you're going through some sort of career change, or just added stress in your life.

Then there are just ongoing:

TRIALS:

Maybe there is a trial right now with your health and the doctors don't know quite fully know what is wrong and you're not sleeping very well. Maybe the trials that are going on are with the economy, or maybe your personal finances.

And then one last one. Maybe it would just be:

TENSION:

Maybe there is tension right now in your marriage, some key relationships, there's interpersonal conflict going on.

This whole thing right here, all of us have a number of stressors going on in our world. Add on to the fact that we are forced to make all kinds of decisions every day, whether we want to or not.

Statistically the average person makes between 60 and 70 thousand decisions per day. And when I say decisions, I mean like, "When am I going to wake up?" "What am I going to eat for breakfast?" "Will I eat breakfast?" "What am I going to wear?" "What route am I going to take to work?" "What meeting am I going to have?"

All of these decisions add up to 60 to 70 thousand a day. We've got all of these stress factors, we've got crises we're dealing with, we've got issues that we are dealing with in our relationships. And after a while, I think we get to this place where we just overload the system.

Maybe right now you're overthinking things, your mind is constantly running. You can't quite ever shut it off. You're not sleeping very well. It's affected your appetite. It's

affecting your relationships and your overall health. And we can get to this place where, eventually, we find ourselves numbing out because we just don't want to think anymore.

You can use anything, even good things, to numb out. We just sit in front of the TV and watch Netflix or maybe you are watching the game, whatever it is, you're using things to numb out because you're tired of thinking and feeling. Or maybe we check out or we end up burning out.

Now this is all very, very real and I want to say, I want to preface all of this by just saying that I am not a physician, I'm a pastor. So I want to stay in my lane. But I do think that there is some overlap. I do think that there is some cross over. I do think we need both. We need physicians and I think we need pastoral guidance and help.

And really, primarily, does the Bible say anything about this? It turns out that the Bible has a lot to say about it. And I want to turn your attention to a passage in the Old Testament called 1 Kings. So if you have a Bible, whether it's digital or paper, go ahead and turn there, 1 Kings, chapter 19.

I want to walk through part of the story of a guy by the name of Elijah. Now, Elijah was a prophet and I used to think, growing up in church (maybe some of you are like me)... I used to think that if your name and story was found in the Bible, then that meant that you had it all together.

Then I read my Bible. And I realized that is not the case. In fact, it's actually quite refreshing that the men and the women who are listed in the Bible, even the ones who God did really powerful things through, and oftentimes, especially them, they were regular human beings like you and me and they struggled. They had temptations and they messed up. And they even wrestled with anxiety, worry, and depression.

That would be the case for Elijah. In fact, Elijah even had thoughts, we'll see it in the text, of the possibility of ending his own life.

Now, to set this all up, in chapter 18—I don't have time to read all of chapter 18. In fact, I would encourage you sometime to go back, maybe later today, and read chapter 18 on your own because it is just this epic showdown between God and the false god Baal, who was a pretty prominent false god at the time.

And there was this famine in the land. No rain. People were struggling. So Elijah gets together with 450 prophets of the false god, Baal. So you've got one against 450. Elijah goes toe to toe with these guys and they basically said, "Okay, here's what we're going to do to determine which God/god has the most power. You guys create an altar. Then we will pray and see which God/god sets the altar on fire. You go first.

And so these prophets they start praying to Baal, and nothing happens. And I love it because, just go back and read it some time, Elijah is the best trash talker in the world.

He's trash talking, and my favorite is when he is like, "Hey, pray louder, pray louder. Maybe he's relieving himself." It's great.

Then Elijah prays. Bam. God ignites the altar. It's an incredible victory. And then we see right after, in chapter 19, that this is when Elijah faces a significant battle with anxiety, depression, and potentially even the thought of suicide.

And honesty can I just say that oftentimes that's how it works? You just need to be aware of it. Whenever you experience some sort of what we might call—call it what you want—a good day or a victory or a spiritual mountaintop experience, whatever it may be. Your adrenaline is pumping, your endorphins are rushing and then when you're coming down from that, both emotionally and spiritually, for whatever reason, oftentimes that is when you and I are the most vulnerable to spiritual and emotional attacks.

When you are stressed and tired and coming down off of that, that's when you are the most vulnerable to temptation, that's when you are the most vulnerable to thoughts of anxiety and depression.

Why it works that way, I don't fully know. I just know that that's how it works. It's how I've observed it in the lives of others and as I see it in God's Word and as I have experienced it in my own life.

I've shared this with you guys before, kind of the rhythm of my week, I've just gotten to this place where I've anticipated it. The two lowest times of my regular work week, spiritually and emotionally, are Sunday afternoons and all day Tuesday.

Now that's just for me. And I think part of the reason why is that it takes so much for me to get ready for this moment that I'm doing right now. Sermon preparation for me is all week long. I'm just putting the logs together on a fire and then I hope that God ignites it. And sometimes He does and sometimes He doesn't.

It could be an incredible weekend. I could feel good about the sermon. We could have all kinds of baptisms, praying with all kinds of people, meeting all kinds of needs and still I'll go home, and I just feel... It's a let down from all of that and I start to second guess myself and I start to struggle, and I feel alone—I've just learned that.

All day Tuesday, that's sermon writing day. And I just feel... You can ask my wife. I'll come home and she'll be like, "How was the day?" And I'm like, "It's Tuesday." And I just feel that kind of...

Now, I don't say that to draw attention to me. I say that to say I know it's a struggle, now you can contextualize it for you. When is it for you? For Elijah, he has this incredible, spiritual victory where he goes toe to toe with 450 false prophets. God comes through for him, and right after that he experiences this battle with anxiety and depression.

And part of what triggered it was Queen Jezebel hears what happens. She's so angry that she says, "I want Elijah dead within 24 hours." And listen to how he responds in verses 3 through 5. You thought you were having a bad day.

"Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah," now notice this, *"...he left his servant there."*

No explanation. Why did he do that? We don't really know. But hold onto that. I'm going to come back to that in a minute. Verse 4:

"Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die."

Now, here's what he's thinking.

"I have had enough, Lord,"

Any of you felt that way? I've just had enough.

"Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.' Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree." 1 Kings 19:3-5 (NLT)

I just love how real this is because we've all been there to various degrees and various times. The irony is that Elijah has just squared off with some very intimidating people. He had an incredible amount of courage and faith and God came through for him. Yet now, in this instance, he doesn't have the courage, he doesn't have the faith. In fact, he's afraid and he runs, and he isolates himself. He withdraws.

I just want you to know that there are going to be times when you are going to face challenges with incredible courage and faith. And maybe in the next moment you're going to wonder where that courage and faith went. And your circumstances are going to overwhelm you. It doesn't mean that there is anything wrong with you. It doesn't mean that you've done anything wrong. It just simply means that you are a human being in a broken world with very real emotions.

It also points out here that he was alone. You wouldn't think that would be the case. I mean, after all, he'd just come through this incredible victory. You would think that he would have crowds of people who would want to travel with him and be associated with him. And I think that probably there was a crowd of people who wanted to be associated with him, but I think that Elijah withdrew.

The reason why I say that is because he left his servant behind. We don't really know the details around all of that. But I do know, speaking from personal experience, that when we begin to struggle emotionally and spiritually one of the natural reactions that we all have is to just sort of pull back and to just begin to withdraw and to isolate.

I've talked to a number of people, even here recently, who have said, "You know, for whatever reason, when I begin to struggle with anxiety and depression, one of the first things that I do, and I don't really know why I do this, is that I just stop attending church. I stop watching. I just withdraw. I end up pulling back."

I don't know the reason for all of that. I'm not even going to presume that upon you. But I do know that one of the ways in which the enemy likes to get us in check mate is that his first move is isolation.

You see, two of the biggest moments that Jesus struggled with in His life were when He was isolated. When He began His earthly ministry He was led out into the desert. He was alone when He went toe to toe with the enemy. And the night before His crucifixion He was with His disciples, they were there, but they were checked out. They kept falling asleep. Even Jesus needed community. He kept saying to the guys, "Guys could you stay awake with Me and pray?" And they kept falling asleep on Him.

So I just want to encourage you right now that when you find the dark clouds of depression, maybe anxiety, if you're over thinking things—I know a very natural reaction is to step back and to withdraw, and I get that. I want to encourage you to step back in.

I'm not down on online ministry. Online has been the front door to our church for a long time. There is a fluidity between physical and digital now a days. We have people who join us, really it's wild, all over the world online. And there are a number of people who can't show up physically. Maybe you may be traveling, and you join us digitally. All of that is great.

Here's my caution and concern that I'll just offer pastorally. Don't just say online so that you can stay isolated and just watch by yourself. If you're going to be online, do it in community.

We have a great example of this. I just heard this last week. There is a community east of here called Spiceland. You can look it up. It's toward the Ohio border. And there are a handful of people who have gotten together at a coffee house, somebody opened up their coffee house, and they were watching us at 9 o'clock. They were watching online.

They invited three families. Today they all showed up. And I love that. They are not just watching alone from their bedroom or their living room, they are gathering together in some sort of a community. And I want to encourage you to do the same. Don't stay alone. That's when we are the most vulnerable.

Look on to what it says in verse 5. Elijah falls asleep and we left him there and it says:

"But as he was sleeping, an angel," did what? *"touched him,"* and I want you to hold on to that because that's really important. *"an angel touched him,"* that's the first thing that he did, *"and told him..."*

Now, what he says here is really, really important for us to understand. He could have said a bunch of things. But the angel said:

“Get up and eat!”

Those are some of my favorite words. You’ve heard me say this before. The top three things, as human beings, we need to hear are: I love you; I forgive you; dinner is ready. Those are things that we want to hear. The angel said to him, “Get up and eat.” So:

“He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones,” man, there is nothing better than homemade bread, *“and a jar of water!”* 1 Kings 19:5-6 (NLT)

Now, what I want to point out to you is that his thoughts were so depleting that he was sleeping the day away. And his routine was interrupted. And he wasn’t functioning properly. And the angel comes and touches him, and I don’t think the angel was just waking him up. I think there is something more to that. I’ll get to that in just a minute.

Of all of the things the angel could have said—the angel could have spiritualized things, the angel could have shamed him, the angel could have said, “What are you doing, man? You’re sleeping the day away. You’re one of the epic prophets. Get up and do your job. Just pray more or confess your sin.”

He doesn’t say any of that. What does the angel say? “Get up and eat. Get up and eat.” In fact, he addresses an emotional problem via a physical need. So then in verse 6, Elijah gets up:

“So he ate and drank,” this shows how deep his anxiety was, *“and lay down again. Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you.’”* 1 Kings 19:6-7 (NLT)

I just take this to mean that Elijah, he just didn’t want to face the day. He just thought, “You know what? It would just be a lot easier if I could just go back to bed.” And I know what that is like, maybe you know what that is like.

There have been two specific seasons of my life that lasted roughly six to nine months. Both seasons when I was in them, it was horrible. I would wake up in the morning and the very first thought that I would have was, “I don’t want to face the day.” I really didn’t want to get up, “It would just be much better if I could just stay here all day.”

Maybe some of you know exactly what that feels like. Maybe you’re there right now. What I want you to see is that God cared enough, here, to send an angel. It doesn’t necessarily identify who the angel was, it just says, “Angel of the Lord.” And I love that. I don’t want to read too much into the passage here, but I will say another way of saying this is that this angel was an agent of encouragement and hope.

Here's what I know. I know you need that today and I know that the person sitting next to you, behind you, and in front of you needs that today.

I've been reading all of these statistics. As a pastor I've been looking at the decline of the church in the western world. It's been happening now for a number of years, even before COVID. COVID just accelerated it.

The church is continuing to decline its influence in the west. And as a pastor, one of the things that I've been praying is, "God, in the remainder of my days, how do I reverse that trend?" Not that it's all up to me. I'm just saying, "How do we turn this thing around and reach more people?"

And I think that there are a lot of things that we could do. I think this is one of them. That we would take it very, very seriously as a local church, that we would be agents of encouragement and hope, because where else are you finding that today?

Right now we are tearing each other apart as a society because of our own pain. When you see somebody lash out and you see the division and you see all of the criticism, that has very little to do with other people's behavior. It has everything to do with the personal unprocessed pain we're all feeling. And so we point fingers of blame, and we divide.

And right now, more than ever, God is calling men and women to step up as ambassadors for Christ and to be agents of encouragement and hope. There is not anybody you will cross paths with today or this week who doesn't have something going on in their lives. So, that ought to make you more gracious toward them.

Have you ever just been out on the road? I pray now more than ever because I've got two teenagers who are driving and another one on the way. And man, my prayer life is way up. Right? When they are driving.

I see somebody have this out-of-control road rage and they just lay into somebody... I feel it all the more now that I've got teenagers on the road. But I've always thought to myself whenever I see that, "Man, do you have any idea who that person is? Do you have any idea what they might be driving away from? Maybe they are driving away from the hospital, and they just lost somebody and now you're going to yell at them and curse them out for maybe some honest mistake?"

I say all of that to say this. You don't know what other people are going through so be kind, be gracious, be agents of encouragement and hope. And that's what the angel of the Lord was doing for Elijah. That's what God is encouraging us to do as well.

The other thing that I want you to see here is that the angel kept touching Elijah and encouraging Elijah to meet a physical need. Now, here's why I think that is so true. It is so crucially important, when it comes to our thought life and our mental health, that we understand (we all know this, we just need to be reminded of it) we are an integrated system.

So what that means is that you can't separate the mental, the physical, the spiritual, and our emotional health, because they are all interconnected. So when one is offline or not running properly, it will affect the others.

So, physically, not taking care of yourself, not sleeping well, not eating right, not exercising that's going to affect you spiritually and emotionally. Same thing, emotionally you're struggling, that's going to affect you physically—it's this integrated system.

And this is so relevant to today. I'm preaching this message and if any of you are watching this in the future on YouTube, we are, right now, in the middle of January in Indiana. What that means, we haven't seen the sun in a long time. Alright? And that means... We know we need sunlight for our emotional health and even physical health. So we've got to recognize that that is an aspect of our health.

Many of you may have these. Lindsay and I have what is called a happy light. It's like this iPad looking thing. And all it does is generate light. So we've got it on our kitchen counter near where we have our coffee every morning. We just get up before the sun comes up, if we ever even see the sun, and we turn that thing on and for 10 or 15 minutes just kind of look into it as we are drinking our coffee, because we know that we are an integrated system. You can't neglect one of these for the other.

We know, and I'm not going to do a deep dive on this because, as I said, I'm not a physician, I'm a pastor. But you all know this. You can google it. There are these chemicals that we all need called neurotransmitters. They come through the nerves into the brain that actually affect mental health.

So one of those would be:

Dopamine: (do something good; accomplish something)

We need dopamine. Dopamine gets triggered when we accomplish something just to keep is super, super simple.

Another is:

Serotonin (healthy food)

That comes through healthy food.

Another would be:

Oxytocin (human connection)

Hold that right there. I think this is part of the reason why it stresses in the text that the angel kept touching Elijah. He knew that he needed that.

There are studies that show one of the reasons we love dogs so much, we just pet them all day long. We're just looking for that. Cats, not so much. It's on their terms. It's on their terms. Right?

And the last one is:

Endorphin (exercise)

And this gets released through exercise. So exercise isn't just vanity. You're not just trying to get six-pack abs. You're actually doing this to release a chemical that your brain needs.

Now, there are other transmitters that will release chemicals that still serve a purpose, but if they are released at the wrong time of the day or in too many doses or if they never shut off, they will affect your mental health.

One of those being Cortisol. And stress causes Cortisol to just be poured in. And when you have too much of it it will affect your mental health.

So to start healing, and to start to begin to recover, we can't just put it all in a spiritual category, spiritualize everything. We can't just put it all in the physician category and all of the biology of it. They are integrated. And they will affect one another. So, we've got to pay attention to the chemicals.

I would simply say this. If you're really, really wrestling with anxiety and mental health, aside from maybe you do need to pursue a physician or a therapist or medication of some kind—no shame in any of that, but I'd also ask some other questions.

Are you in community? Are you getting enough touch? Are you sleeping? Are you eating right? Are you exercising? Because it is an integrated system.

Here is the other thing that I might say. It might surprise you to hear that not all worry is bad. I think we are used to hearing that worry is bad and say, "Hey, don't worry about it." But God actually designed worry as part of your central nervous system to protect you.

So whenever there is something that is kind of dangerous that's in front of you, you perceive that, it sends a message to your brain, and you need to do something about it. You need to navigate around it. You need to take some sort of action to preserve yourself.

So worry is not the problem. Worry is a gift. Here's the problem. When your amygdala gets stuck and goes unchecked like a wide-open accelerator and instead of redirecting the worry, instead of resolving the worry, doing something about it, we sort of get stuck on it and it's kind of like a washing machine, we just churn on it over and over and over again.

Here's what happens because of neuroplasticity, your neurological pathways end up getting reshaped through all of those thought processes and then that has the potential to become crippling or even chronic anxiety.

I want you to think about it this way:

Worry takes place in your brain.

Worry primarily takes place in your brain.

Anxiety is felt in your body.

Worry is specific.

Worry is something that is very specific, it is tangible. You can do something with it. You can make a decision.

Anxiety is vague.

Anxiety is very, very vague and you're not quite sure what to do with it. So, an example of this would be, let's just say you are on your way to the airport, and you've got a flight to catch. You get stuck in traffic and a worry pops into your mind, "I might miss the flight."

That's very understandable, but you can do something about it. You can take a different route. You can call the airline to rebook your flight. (Unless it's Southwest, I didn't do that first hour. I thought it might be too soon. But I had a number of you come up to me and say, "No, no, no. Go ahead and use it. Go ahead and use it.") You can do something about it. Right?

But with anxiety, you get to the airport, you get on the plane, the plane is taking off, but you still feel anxious. You don't know why. You're like, "Something bad might happen. Maybe we'll still be late." And you can't shut your mind off.

Or maybe it's like, "I've got a legitimate worry. I've got to make a mortgage payment on the 15th of the month. So, let's not miss it. Let's set a reminder. Whatever. Legitimate but let's just say you make the payment, the 15th comes and goes, you're still thinking about it. And it's very, very vague like, "Well, what if I shut the oven off. What if there is black mold growing behind the walls?" There are all of these things that just continue to churn, and churn, and churn. And you can't really do anything about it.

So anxiety is sort of like wrestling or sparring with a ghost. You can never land a punch because it's so vague. Let me say it this way:

Anxiety is unchecked worry that makes its way from your head to your heart.

You're not really sure what you can do about it. So, is there anything you can do? Well, first of all let me just say, very practically, you might need to consult a physician or a therapist or take medication of some kind as a tool to help with the healing of your mind. There is no shame in it.

Number two: You might wrestle with this on some level, through different seasons, with different intensities for the rest of your life. Why? Because you're an imperfect human being living in a fallen world. And I just want to say that it is totally okay.

Maybe you were in a church setting or maybe around Christians who said things and maybe they meant well but it didn't help. They said things, when you told them you were anxious or struggling with your mental health that sort of dismissed it. They didn't know what to say or they didn't identify, they didn't have any empathy. Or maybe they said, "Well, how's your prayer life?" Or, "Are you doing your Bible every day?" Or, "Is there any unconfessed sin in your life?"

And I just want to say... I'm not saying that they are entirely wrong. I'm just saying that that is pretty poorly misplaced and it's not very emotionally intelligent.

Can I say this to you today? Some of you need to hear this. God does not punish you for sin by sending anxiety into your life. Theologically, it's just not found.

And here's why I can say that. It's because when Jesus went to a cross and you trusted Him as Lord and Savior of your life, here's what happened. Jesus took all of your sin, all of your shame, all of your guilt and He nailed it there and He absorbed it into Himself, and He paid the price for your sin. And God does not punish the same sin twice. Jesus paid it for you.

Now, with that said, that doesn't mean that there aren't consequences to certain decisions that we make. It doesn't mean that there are not consequences to sin. It just means that God isn't up there going, "Well, you know, you've not confessed your sin to Me so here's some anxiety." No He doesn't do that.

So please understand that and with that said, let me just say this. There is a way, there is a way to experience peace in the midst of anxiety even if it is an ongoing struggle. And it's through this process of healing.

Real briefly, as I close out I want to just close with some encouragement that a guy named Paul writes in the book of Philippians. Philippians, chapter 4, verse 6, here's what he writes. He says:

"Don't worry about anything."

Hey, stay with me. Some of you just tuned me out. Because that verse, unfortunately has maybe used and misused and mistaught and misapplied. You've had a well-meaning Christian use this verse to kind of shame you in some way. So hang with me. Hear what he says and what he doesn't say.

He goes,

"Don't worry about anything," here's the key word, *"instead,"* this is another word for redirect, *"pray about everything."*

You might read this and go, "Man, that's impossible. I can't not worry about something." Well he doesn't say never worry. He say's don't. Meaning don't stay there. Don't dwell on it. Do something about it.

So think about this practically. When worries come into your mind via the amygdala remember that God created you that way to preserve your life and keep you from danger. Totally okay.

But then we've got a decision to make, "Is there something I can do about it? Then I'm going to do something about it. If I can't do anything about it, "Okay, where do I need to redirect this thing? I'm not going to dwell on this. I'm not going to worry and allow this to affect me mentally." That's such an important distinction to make.

Here's what worry is:

Worry is you talking to yourself about your problems.

So worry is inverted prayer. Instead of going to God, it just terminates on you. You can think about it this way. When you worry, that is a cue to pray. You're like, "Okay, man. If this is staying with me then I need to redirect it." That's exactly what he said in the passage.

So when I just worry and I sit there, that is me rehearsing worst case scenarios in my mind. And that has never done me any good. Has it ever done you any good? It is you spending enormous amounts of emotional energy on things that may never happen. It is a down payment on a problem you may never have.

Somebody once described it this way. Worry is an internal false prophet of doom that prophesizes a hopeless future. It sounds awful. Why do we do it? Well I can't presume as to why you do it. I know why I do it. I do it as a form of control. When things go out of control I think, "Well, I'm just going to worry this thing into the ground."

Now, check out verses 6 and 7. He says this. Instead, here's what you do. This next sentence is so powerful:

"Tell God what you need,"

And I would add, go big. Go big. God wants you to pray bold prayers. I know we've been taught, "Hey, don't be selfish." Don't be selfish, but that doesn't mean you can't go big.

"Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done."

I don't know about you, I often forget that last part, especially when I'm in need. And here's the result. He says:

"Then you will," say the word out loud with me, "experience," it's something you experience, "God's peace..."

He says nothing about resolving your issues, he says nothing about the circumstances getting better, none of this like, "Hey, if God shuts the door He'll open a window." He doesn't say any of that. He says that you'll experience His peace:

"which exceeds anything we can understand." Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

In other words, I can't put an equation around it. I can't necessarily explain it. But I'm experiencing it. There is so much packed into these three sentences that is so refreshing if you really stop to listen and here's what it is. Here's what God desires from us when we find ourselves in the pit of anxiety. God says, "Hey, the way to healing is relational, it is not transactional."

I don't know about you, but I so often want a transactional God. I just want to say, "God, here's what I need. Do it." And if God doesn't do it, then I question His existence or His goodness. God desires a relationship and that's how relationships work. Tell Him what you need and thank Him for what He has done.

I don't know about you. I used to think that life was either a series of ups or downs. Either one or the other. I used to think that your day was either good or bad. I used to think that it was either blessings or curses. But I'm learning that it isn't that cut and dry.

Life, instead of a series of mountain tops and valleys, it's actually more like a series of railroad tracks. And right now if you and I were to sit down over a cup of coffee, I could share with you that right now in my life, like right now, there are some tremendous blessings, things that I am so grateful for, that I honestly don't deserve. And I'd also be able to share with you the other side of the tracks, some things that are going on right now that I'm burdened by, I'm wounded by, I'm struggling with. They go side by side.

Paul knew that as he wrote these words. And he said, "What this means is that every single one of us can right now tell God what we need, and we can thank Him for all that He has done. And here's the promise that he gives in verse 7:

"His peace" will what? "...guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 4:7 (NLT)

I just want to finish up the passage. He says in verses 8 and 9:

“And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts...”

That’s another way of saying, think about what you think about. On what? And then he gives us eight things.

“...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 putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing.”

Here’s the promise, the last sentence:

“Then the God of peace,”

He doesn’t say He will deliver you. He doesn’t say He will fix all of your problems. He says, He:

“will be with you.” Philippians 4:8-9 (NLT)

This is so practical and honestly encouraging if you hear it and you receive it. He’s basically saying, “Fix your thoughts,” you can’t control what pops into your mind. You can control if you allow it to make a mess and stay there. So he says, “Redirect it. Clean up the mess. Move on.”

Now, I know you can do this. And the reason I can say that so confidently is because, if you have ever potty trained a toddler or housebroken a puppy, you can do this.

Same concept. A thought comes into your mind. Makes a mess. “Okay, what am I going to do? Am I going to allow it to stay there and stink? Or am I going to clean it up. Am I going to send it on?”

And he says, “Here’s how you do this.” It’s an eight-question test right here. He’s like:

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?

This pretty much eliminates like 90 percent of the Internet. And it’s this idea of paying attention to what you expose yourself to and what you allow in your head.

If you've been in our church for any number of years at all you've heard me say this. The number one command in Scripture is simply two words: Fear not.

The number one command in Scripture is not to pray more. It's not to give more. It's not to serve more. It's: Fear not. And that's true. It's mentioned hundreds and hundreds of times in the Bible because God knew we would need to hear that. Not just in this generation, but in every generation.

We oftentimes overlook what comes after that a lot of the time. It says, "Fear not, for I am with you." And what God promises is not necessarily an immediate change of your circumstances. That can happen. It may not.

He's saying, "I'll promise you something better than that. I promise you joy, which actually supersedes your circumstances." And He says, "I desire to come near to you to be with you in the midst of your fear." It's His presence that you need first and foremost.

Our kids are getting a little bit older now, but when they were younger we took them to Disney on a handful of occasions. My oldest daughter, Campbell, she's 18 now, but when she was maybe six or seven, she wanted to ride the Haunted Mansion.

And I kind of warned her, like, "Honey, I don't know if you're ready for that." But she liked that kind of stuff. She was totally confident. She was like, "No, Dad. I want to do it. None of the other kids wanted to do it. So I was like, "Alright, I'll take you."

So we get in line and I'm watching her whole body language change because as she was standing in line she started to observe things. And I could see that she started to ruminate out loud. So she started to make these statements to me, but they really weren't for me. She was saying them to herself. She looked at the cemetery off to the side and she was like, "That's not real. I know it's not real."

And I could see her start to feel a little nervous. She was listening to the creepy music. And she heard something going on inside the house and she kind of jumped a little bit, "Oh, you know, that's all fake. That's just for show."

And I was like, "Hey, honey. Are you sure you want to do this?" And she was like, "No, I want to do it. I want to do it." But she kept ruminating, talking out loud, talking herself into it all the way up to where we got on the ride. We sat down. We locked in. And as soon as the thing starts to go she loses it. She was like, "I don't want to do this."

At that point there was nothing I could do. And she kind of buried her head into my shoulder. And she just started crying. And I'm trying to comfort her through the whole ride. I was like, "What kind of therapy is she going to need in the future?" And I'm like, "Oh gosh."

So we get through the whole thing. And we get out. And I'm thinking, "Okay, it's over. She's going to calm down." But she didn't. It just escalated. It got worse. So we walked

out of the ride. We walk down to a little sidewalk area in front of the ride. It was crowded. People were walking all around. And she's trembling.

She's crying to the point where she can't even walk. She was not even making sense. She kept sobbing. And I couldn't calm her down. So I did all that I could do in that moment. I bent down and picked her up and I wrapped my arms around her. I just started rocking her side to side. She cried on my shoulder. And I just said these words over and over again. I just said, "I'm right here. I'm right here."

I know this might sound a little sick and twisted, but we've taken our kids to Disney a bunch of times. That is my favorite memory. And it's not because my little girl was in pain, it's because it was an opportunity for me to draw near.

You have a heavenly Father who does not relish the emotional pain that some of you are experiencing right now. What He does desire is to draw near. The question is, will you let Him? Don't withdraw. Don't pull back. But step forward into His promise that He has given.

So today that's what we're going to do as we wrap up this message, the first message in a new series in a new year. We're going to do communion together at all of our locations. Hopefully you grabbed communion on your way in. Those of you who are followers of Christ, I just invite you to take this. If you're not, that is totally okay. I want you to be able to do some reflection on the message and to pray the same prayer.

Here's what I want to ask you to do. Do not open up the communion just yet, I want to give you some instructions. I'm going to ask you to spend just a moment or two with communion in your hand and I want you to pray this prayer.

"God, here's what I need." And I want You to go big. "God, right now I need You to save my marriage. There's no practical reason why it could be or should be saved. I don't even deserve for it to be saved. But, God, would you save it?"

"God, I need you to heal me from this thing," whether is physical or emotional.

"God, I need a job."

I want you to go big. I want you to get selfish. Tell God what you need. You can pray a bold prayer. He can handle it. He's asked you to do it.

Here's the second thing I want you to pray. I want you to tell Go then I want you to thank Him for what He has done. God, thank You for what You have done. Thank You for the blessing that You've given in my life. Don't forget that last part.

Tell God what you need and thank Him for what He has done and take the bread, which represents His body, and take the juice that represents His blood and realize that because He went to a cross and came back from that, you can come back from this.

You can. So, take a few moments and pray that prayer and take communion. Then I'll close us out in prayer.

Pause

Father, I know that if we could pull back the veil and see the fear and experience the amount of emotional pain that is represented in these rooms and online, it would be overwhelming. And yet we know that You do see it and You do hear it and You do feel it. And You have compassion.

You have been there. And Your Son was tempted in every way that we are tempted. He has experienced everything that we experience—all of the human emotions.

We know that in the garden He was so anxious that it said that His blood vessels burst, and the blood mixed with sweat in all of the anguish He was under. And yet He went through with that so that we would not only have eternal life, but that we could experience peace in the now.

So, God, I pray that over us today. If there are some who feel a lot like Elijah, and they maybe wonder if it would just be better if they weren't here, or they'd rather just sleep all day, God I pray that they would experience Your touch, they would recognize that there is hope and that You desire to draw near in the midst of their pain.

So, Father, we want to give that to You today. There is a lot to be worried about. We live in a really messy, broken world. But, God, we don't want to stay on those things. We want to redirect them to You. You are sovereign and in control of this out-of-control world and You've already worked the victory. So we claim that, and we place that upon You.

I pray today that You would give us a little help, give us a little hope, and give us encouragement to face the day, to face the week ahead, to know that as long as we are drawing air into our lungs that we still have a hope and a purpose.

So we tell You what we need. And we thank You for what You have done. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen.