

Thankful Prayer

The Peace of God Part 6
Philippians 4:5b-7 4/22/2017

Summary: Principle 1 for fighting anxiety: use the emotional energy to pray hard (God's preferred way of getting things done), 2) be genuinely thankful (feeling of favor toward God in response to his favor toward you) for whatever God is going to do even if it's painful, and 3) rest in the promise of his nearness. The result will be peace that is far greater than anything the world's securities can provide.

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Protected by Peace

Under Guard

Imagine late tonight you got a knock on your door, you open it up, and there's a whole SWAT team in full gear standing outside your house. And the guy in charge tells you, "We're here to guard your family, so you don't have to worry." What would you say? "Guard my family from what? What's the threat that requires us to be guarded?"

That's the same question we should be asking when we read Php.4:7, because it talks about something guarding us. We should do what he says to do in v.6, *so that* we will be protected. God's special forces will station just outside the door of our inner man and stand guard.

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds

The Danger

So what's the danger we're being guarded from? That's in v.6. The peace of God will guard your heart and mind from your own heart and mind. The threat in v.6 that we're guarded from is anxiety, and anxiety is a product of your own heart and mind. It's like cancer. Cancer is when your body goes crazy multiplying cells – to the point where your body destroys itself. Anxiety is when your heart and mind go crazy with undirected emotional energy that can destroy the very heart and mind that's producing the anxiety. And if you want to see how both heart and mind¹ are damaged by anxiety, just look at our case study from last time – Martha.

Mind

Distraction

First, the mind. What kind of effect did Martha's anxiety have on her thinking?

Luke 10:40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.

¹ When you see the words *heart* and *mind* together like this, usually the word *heart* refers mainly to your emotions, and *mind* refers mainly to your thoughts.

That's the damage it does to your mind - *distraction*. Martha had an opportunity to share a wonderful evening in person with the Son of God – the Creator of the Universe in her living room, and she missed it because she was distracted by vacuuming. She was running out of flour – a broken dish, and she misses out on one of the greatest opportunities to ever take place in human history.

Anxiety dominates your thoughts so you become distracted from what's most important. The preparations for the meal became more important than the *reason* for the meal. Like a football player who misses the Superbowl because he wants to hit the practice field that day.

If Satan can turn your anxiety into mental distraction, he can pretty much incapacitate your mind. He can neutralize your greatest defense. He just takes your mind out of the picture by jumbling it up with distraction.

Foolishness

And then you start making dumb decisions. Anxiety makes you put too much weight on the one thing and not enough on other things, and so you make foolish decisions.

Heart

That's what it will do to your mind; what about the heart? What kind of damage will anxiety do there?

Attitudes

Well, in Martha's case it really did a number on her attitude, didn't it? And again – her bad attitude turned what should have been the greatest moment of her entire life into something that was a big bummer. That's the power of a bad attitude – it can take the greatest vacation, the best family get-together, the greatest blessings from God, the most wonderful things in life and ruin it for everyone. A bad attitude can turn the grand privilege of being able to serve the King of kings into a drudgery and a burden.

Anger

And not just attitude problems, but also anger problems. The more stressed out you get, the more easily you're angered. It sounds like Martha was irritated at both Mary and Jesus. When you get like that, you're mad at everyone who's not helping you, which is the whole world. Anxiety tends to make you selfish, and selfishness makes you susceptible to anger.

Peace

That's just a sampling of the kind of damage anxiety can do in your heart and mind – I'm sure we could identify many others. But if you pray the way Paul teaches us to pray here, your mind will be guarded from distraction and foolishness and your heart will be protected from bad attitudes, anger, and all the other sins that come from an anxious heart. You'll have the very peace of God. God cares a lot about important things, and he is emotional about them, but he isn't flustered. He has perfect peace in his heart, and when you pray this way, you'll have that same peace. Praying the way Paul describes in this passage reminds you of who God is and what he is like, it puts your worries in perspective, it reorients your attention, and it corrects misaligned priorities. And so in place of that knot in your stomach, you'll have peace. Instead of having turmoil and thoughts spinning out of control in your head, you'll be calm on the inside have control over your thoughts. The tense muscles in your back and neck will relax. Instead of chaos on the inside, there will be the very same kind of calm that God has in his own heart.

Beyond Understanding

You will have a peace that **transcends all understanding**. Literally, **peace that is above the mind**. It is above and beyond human thinking. You can't talk yourself into this kind of peace. You can't get there through reasoning or optimism or figuring things out or talking things over.

Look at the realm where this peace operates. **7 The peace of God that is above the mind will guard your hearts and minds in Christ**. Special, supernatural peace that only comes through Christ. When Paul wrote this he might have had Jesus' words in mind from Jn.14.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

The world can give you peace of mind in various ways. A large, secure retirement account. Job security. Health insurance. Lifetime warranty's. A good deadbolt on your front door. Police. A strong military. This world offers a lot of things designed for giving you peace of mind, and I'm thankful for those things. But the peace you get from those things is very limited. Your 401K brings you peace of mind until the stock market crashes, then it brings you anxiety. Feeling like you have job security gives peace until they lay you off. You can have a Cadillac health insurance plan, but it will do nothing to calm your heart when someone in your family says, "I hate you – get out of my life." All the sources of peace in this world have limitations. They will give you peace in one category of life, and only up to a point. They won't give you peace in those times when you have anxiety for no apparent reason. And they won't give you peace in those times when you need it the most - when everything falls apart and everything that is stable in your life crumbles. But the peace of God will. Psalms 46:13 promises that even when the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, and its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake – when all the stability of life is collapsing, we will not fear because God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Even if your whole world falls apart – even if all your closest friends turned on you and wanted to murder you – this peace can calm your heart.

1 Samuel 30:6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him But David found strength in the LORD his God.

Psalms 94:19 When anxieties within me are many, your comforts delight my soul.

That's the rhythm of the Christian life – anxieties arise, God's comforts delight your soul; anxieties arise, God delights your soul, etc.

1) Passionate Prayer

Review

So how do you get that amazing peace? Paul gives us three principles. The first one we looked at last time – passionate prayer. Most of the time we don't pray hard because we don't have the emotional energy. But when you have some driving anxiety over something, that gives you the energy you need to really pray.

God's Way of Getting Things Done

It works that way because that's God's preferred way of doing great things in his kingdom. When God wants to do some great work, he typically will put a driving anxiety in the heart of one of his people, that anxiety drives that person to passionate prayer, God answers that prayer by doing the great work he wanted to do.

Sometimes people struggle with how prayer fits with the sovereignty of God. They say, "If God already has everything planned out, what's the point of praying? If I trust God, why not just say, 'God,

you know best, so just do whatever you want, and that will be fine by me'?" The answer is simple – Yes, God is going to accomplish his plan, but that's not the way he wants to accomplish it. He has a better way in mind. The way he wants to do it is by planting his will in the heart of one of his people, and then refuse to act until they become burdened enough to really pray hard for it in the name of Jesus, and then God does it in answer to their prayers to honor his Son. That way he accomplishes his will, but he does it in a way that brings joy to his people, honor to his Son, and glory to his name. God is glorified as a loving father who answers the prayers of his people. Jesus is honored as the reason why God answers the prayers – only because they were offered in his name. And we receive joy because our father in heaven is granting us the deep, driving desire of our hearts. That's why we don't just say, "God, do whatever you want." We seek to discover his will, then we pray our heart out asking him to do it, and then we rejoice in him when he answers.

2) Thankful Prayer

So that's the first principle Paul gives us – passionate prayer. But some of you hear that and think, "It doesn't work for me. I pray my heart out, and I end up even more anxious than I was to start with." If that happens, it's probably because you're missing a key ingredient. But it's not what you would naturally guess. My first thought would be that if you have anxiety, the missing ingredient in your prayers is probably faith and trust. If you're worried and upset, you just need to trust God more. If I were writing this, I probably would have said, "in everything, by prayer and petition, *with faith* make your requests known to God."

That's certainly a biblical idea – no question about that. That was Jesus' solution to the Disciples' anxiety in Jn.14.

John 14:1 Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

So trusting God and his goodness and wisdom and love and power – that's essential for overcoming anxiety – no question about that. But that's not what he focuses on here. Look at what he says:

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Gratitude Touches the Emotions

When you're fighting anxiety, faith is crucial, but so is gratitude, and here's why – anxiety is mainly an emotional problem. Very often it's irrational. You know in your mind that this thing is not worth stressing over – and yet you're still stressed out. In your mind, you know God can be trusted, but in your emotions, the anxiety is still there. To overcome anxiety, you need to think a certain way, but you also need to *feel* a certain way. You have to get your emotions under control. And nothing will put out the wildfire of negative emotions more than gratitude. I doubt it's possible to have anxiety and gratitude in your heart at the same time. When you feel gratitude, you won't feel anxiety.

The Meaning of Gratitude

But that's only if it's real gratitude. So let's take a minute to make sure we understand what gratitude is: How would you define it?

- It is something more than just saying the words, "thank you" (we can all picture a child mouthing those words and still being ungrateful).
- It's something more than simply enjoying the gift (a kid can really like the thing he got and not be thankful).

How can you tell if that kid is really thankful for a gift? You can tell how thankful they are by the tightness of the hug that you get. Gratitude is not the enjoyment of the gift. Gratitude is the enjoyment of the love that inspired the gift, and the response of love back to the giver. Gratitude is always intensely relational. There is no such thing as impersonal gratitude. When Thanksgiving Day rolls around, it's not uncommon to hear even secular people talk about what they are thankful for. "I'm thankful for my mom and dad." "I'm thankful that we live in a free country." "I'm thankful for my good health." And I always want to ask, "Thankful to whom?" They almost never say, "I'm thankful to God for my good health." There's no personal aspect to it. They just say, "I'm thankful for good health," and really all they mean is, "I like having good health." "I like living in a free country." They aren't really talking about gratitude; they're just talking about things they are glad they have." Real gratitude is always directed toward a person. It's a response of emotional favor towards that person when they have shown favor to you.

So being thankful to God is more than just counting your blessings. You can count your blessings until you're blue in the face, and recognize them as wonderful things, and really enjoy them a lot, and still not experience any real gratitude. Gratitude is when you are paying attention to God, receiving some gesture of his love as a gesture of his love, and that warms up your heart toward God because you realize that the gift is a symbol of the warmth of his heart toward you.

Both Hopeful Asking and Joyful Receiving

That's why thanksgiving is so crucial. God wants your prayers to be like a kid on Christmas morning. What would Christmas be like if it were just asking? Just go downstairs, sit down by the tree, read off your Christmas wish list, then Christmas is over. Christmas wouldn't be quite the same. The reason mom and dad ask you for a list is because they want to see your face light up when you open the boxes. They want that tight hug around their neck when you get a gift that just blows you away. God wants that too, and so he teaches us here, that your prayer time should be a time of both hopeful asking *and* happy receiving. And you can tell happy receiving is going on when there are feelings – not just words, but feelings of gratitude.

And that's especially important in times of stress and anxiety. Praying about your anxieties without gratitude will make your anxiety even worse. A lot of times people think they are praying about their problems, but in reality all they are doing is continuing their anxious thoughts and throwing the word "God" in and closing their eyes and calling it prayer. But there is no relational interchange going on, and so the peace doesn't come.

The Importance of Gratitude

It's hard to overstate the importance of gratitude. It's one of the healthiest, most profitable things you can ever do. It is the antidote to self-pity, it's the cure for depression, it is the solution for joylessness, it improves your prayer life, it makes you get along better with people, it gives you energy – it's even the cure for greed and sexual immorality.

Ephesians 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed 4 but rather thanksgiving.

How Gratitude Cures Anxiety

So there are all kinds of wonderful benefits to gratitude, but the one we see in this passage is that it's the cure for anxiety. And here's how that works: You have anxiety when your world is going to pot. When your whole world is going down the tubes and you are overrun with trouble – that's when anxiety cranks up. But the reality is, if you're a child of God your world is never overrun with trouble. It's never even half way full of trouble. Not even a quarter of the way. The reason it feels like your life is 80 or 90% trouble is because you've chosen to fix your attention on the trouble, and turn a blind eye to all the blessings God is giving you.

Think about it – how many problems do you have right now? 10? 20? 50? And how many blessings from God do you have? Let’s just forget about all the little ones and focus on the big ones. If you were to count up all the big blessings and gestures of love God is giving you in your life right now, when you were all done counting, what do you think the number would be? Do you think it would be less than 1000? I doubt it. So if we have just 10 or 20 major problems, and hundreds or thousands of blessings, why does it feel like everything is going wrong in your life? How can we have 1000 blessings and walk around thinking, “Woe is me”? It’s because we blind ourselves to God’s kindness and love, and stare intently at our problems until we become convinced that all we have is problems. Doing that will damage you emotionally so that when you do finally acknowledge God’s love, you’ll do that intellectually, but you won’t feel any joy or peace from it.

But here’s the great news: that can be turned around – in a day. All you have to do is stop and enjoy God’s gestures of love toward you enough times throughout the day. Try it. I’m offering you a free, no-risk trial. Try it tomorrow – shoot for 20 times. It might just be 10 or 15 seconds each time. Twenty times during the day, stop and enjoy some gesture of God’s love, and respond back to him. Even if you can’t hit 20, if a dozen times tomorrow you stop and enjoy God’s emotional favor toward you in some blessing, and you respond with emotional favor back toward him – try that and see if you don’t have greater joy than you’ve had in a long time.

We Don’t Deserve Anything Good

And it helps if you realize that you don’t deserve anything good. Ungrateful people are ungrateful because they think they deserve all the gifts they get from God. They think they somehow just have it coming. They think the norm should be that everything turns out the way they prefer, and any deviation from that means something is wrong with this world. So God gives them 1000 blessings and good gifts, and then one thing doesn’t go the way they want, and they freak out. “What did I do to deserve this hardship?” It’s good to just stop and remind yourself once in a while: *you don’t deserve anything God ever gave you*. We didn’t deserve one single breath of the air we’ve breathed. Not one doughnut. Not one good night’s sleep. What we deserve is the opposite, and if you think very long about that, you’ll find gratitude popping up everywhere in your heart.

Thankful for Whatever God Will Do

So we overcome anxiety through being thankful, but thankful for what? If you are all spun up over something and you want peace in your heart, and you remember this verse about being thankful in times of anxiety, what are the specific things that you should be grateful to God for? The command is that we do this **in everything**.

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

So what should you be thankful for? Three things.

#1 – The things God has done for you in the past.

#2 – The things God is currently doing in your life.

#3 – The things God is going to do.

Now, the hardest one for anxious people is that third one, and yet that’s the most important one for overcoming anxiety. When your heart is in turmoil, and so you fall on your knees and start praying your heart out, in order for the result to be the peace of God moving in and calming your heart, you have to *already* be thankful for whatever God is going to do in the situation, even though you don’t know what that is yet.

James 4 Prayers

Now, that will sound like total nonsense to people who have a “nevertheless, my will be done” kind of attitude about prayer. Instead of desiring God’s will above their own, it’s the other way around. For them, prayer is like an intercom to buzz the great bellhop in heaven to bring you a pillow or adjust the thermostat. The purpose of prayer is always, “God, make my life more comfortable.”² And when you pray like that, you can’t pray with gratitude, because you don’t know if he’s going to do it or not. You have to wait and see how good the service is. If he does what you ask, then you’re thankful.

What if it’s Going to Be Painful?

How can you already be thankful if the answer might be no? Your teenager is 2 hours late coming home, the roads are icy, and her cellphone is going straight to voicemail. Here comes the anxiety. So you drop to your knees and pray your heart out. “*Please, God, let her be ok!*” And then you get to the, “*Nevertheless, your will, not mine, be done – I’m already thankful for whatever you’re going to do.*” And you think, *What if God’s perfect plan is for me to get the horrible call from a state trooper, “We’re so sorry – we did everything we could”?* What if God’s perfect plan for you right now is to go through the most painful ordeal of your life? If that’s what God decides to do, then that’s what’s best. So you embrace that and say, “God, if that’s what you have in your perfect plan, then I know that’s what is best. So thank you for whatever it is you’re going to do.”

You see, the idea isn’t to assume God will do what you want, and trust in that. Just the opposite. You need to face the possibility of the most painful scenario, and embrace that as what’s best if that’s what God decides to do. And that’s when gratitude comes. You think, *I can’t lose. Whatever happens, I’ll know it’s God’s perfect plan for me, and it’s what is best, and so it will be a good thing for me even if it’s painful.* And fear and anxiety evaporate. There’s nothing to be afraid of.

But it takes some work to convince your heart. Last week I realized I was missing my cell phone and so I drove back to the Black Eyed Pea, where I had it last, and on the drive, I was praying and asking God to let me find the phone. It would cost me hundreds of dollars, lots of time, I’d lose my pictures, etc. So I asked God to let me find it, and then I said this, “But God, if it’s in your perfect plan for me not to find it, thank you. Thank you for whatever you have planned, even if it’s the hardship of losing the phone.”

That’s what I said to God on the drive down there, but I realize now looking back on it that I didn’t take the time and effort required to actually convince my heart. I didn’t take the time to imagine losing the phone, picture how I would feel and what would result, and then actually emotionally embracing that as God’s perfect plan. And to keep thinking that way until I truly felt genuine emotions of gladness and gratitude in my heart. I didn’t do that. I prayed the right thing, because over the years I’ve trained myself to pray that way, but looking back, it was mostly just empty words.

So the phone was lost, I had to buy a new one, and then I had all kinds of trouble getting that one set up, and I became irritable and annoyed and hard to be around (I’m ashamed to say). I said words about being thankful, but I wasn’t really thankful in my heart.

There have been other times when I did take the time to really embrace the worst case scenario ahead of time while I was praying, and when I did that, I did have real gratitude in my heart, and that brought amazing peace. So I know this works. I’ve experienced it many, many times. But it’s not just a simple, easy ritual of saying certain words about thankfulness. It has to be real gratitude – real enjoyment of God as your good Father and real enjoyment of the certainty that he will do what is best.

3) Rest in His Nearness

Ok, so those are two principles for overcoming anxiety – passionate prayer and thankful prayer. Now one more. This one is from the phrase that we skipped at the end of v.5.

² These are the people in James 4. **James 4:3** When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your (covetous) desires.

5 The Lord is near.

Belongs with v.6

It's usually assumed that that phrase goes with what he said right before it. Let your reasonableness be evident to all (because) the Lord is near. So the idea is that we should be reasonable with each other, because otherwise we'll have to answer to the Lord for being unreasonable. And that very well may be what Paul meant by this. It certainly makes sense – both kinds of nearness – his presence being nearby and his coming being near in time³, either way, it's a strong motivation for us to be reasonable and loving toward one another. That's exactly what James said.

James 5:9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

If your dad told you to get along with your brother, and your dad is standing right there, or he's going to be back any minute, then you find a way to get along with your brother. So that might be what Paul meant here – a warning. However, I think it's more likely that the phrase “**the Lord is near**” goes with what comes after it rather than what comes before it. So instead of, “Be reasonable because the Lord is near,” he's saying, “The Lord is near so don't be anxious about anything.” So the idea is not a warning, but a comfort. Don't worry, don't fret, don't get all worked up or stressed out – why? Because the Lord is right here with you. He's near. One reason I take it that way is because there are only two other places where the Bible says the Lord is near using these same words. And they both have to do with comfort, not warning.

Psalms 145:18 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

Psalms 34:18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

So to take this as a word of comfort to keep us from anxiety would fit with the way the words are used elsewhere in Scripture. And more importantly, I think it also fits the context of Php.4 better. Look at what he goes on to say about the nearness of God in the rest of the passage:

5 The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything

7 the peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds

That's a comforting promise of his nearness.

9 the God of peace will be with you.

The Lord is near, his peace will guard your heart, and the God of peace will be with you. That's the thrust of this whole section. He will be near you, his peace will be near you, so don't be anxious or upset.

Be Comforted by God's Nearness

Paul introduces this section on anxiety with that phrase because the very first thing you need to understand in stressful situations is that the Lord is near. That's what will enable you to be genuinely, emotionally glad while you're praying even before you know how God will answer your prayer or what he will do.

Seeking Your Father

Imagine a little kid who gets caught by a bully who is beating him up, and the kid is helpless. But suddenly he sees his dad driving by, and he shouts at the top of his lungs, “Dad!!!” But he thinks,

³ There is also debate as to whether this nearness is spatial (close by) or temporal (returning soon). Both are possible, and scholars are divided. If the phrase goes with what follows, however, then it is most likely spatial.

“There’s no way dad heard me in the car.” But then he sees the brake lights go on, and the door opens and his dad comes flying out of the car. And the kid is so happy to see that. Why is he happy? His dad hasn’t even done anything yet. He hasn’t provided any help yet. Why is the kid already glad? Because he knows his dad. He knows his dad’s love for him, he knows his dad’s protection, and he knows his dad’s wisdom and his dad’s strength. His dad is way stronger than this bully, and he really loves his son a lot, and that’s all this kid needs to know. Dad is here now – I’m going to be fine.

So how is his dad going to handle this situation, exactly? What’s the best thing to do? Call the police? Talk to the bully’s parents? Slap the bully around a bit? You ask this 7 year old kid, “What’s your dad going to do? What’s the best approach for a long term solution to this problem?” He has no idea. “I don’t know what he’s going to do, and I don’t know what the best solution is. That’s why I’m so glad that dad is here. He’s way stronger than that bully, he’s smart, he’ll know what to do, he’ll know how to handle it. I don’t know what to do - I’m just really, really glad my dad is here.”

If your prayers are treat God as a servant, then you can’t be thankful until you see what kind of service he provides. But if you pray to God not as a bellhop, but as your Father – if you’re like a kid in trouble calling out to your dad, then as soon as you see those brake lights come on – as soon as you know your dad is there and he hears you crying out – that’s all you need. You’re thankful already, even though you have no idea how he’s going to respond, because you know he’s really strong and really smart and really loves you a lot.

The most basic principle for overcoming anxiety in your life is to learn to rest in the presence of a Father who loves you, who hates bullies, who gets really upset when something hurts you, and who is really, really smart, and who is super strong – way stronger than the other kid’s dad, way stronger than all your problems put together, and who has promised to always be with you.

John 14:18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Matthew 28:20 surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

The next time you find yourself all spun up about some problem, and there is no peace in your heart, imagine God just speaking out loud to you and saying, “Why are you acting like I’m not right here?”

Recently my son came across a car with its hazards on stopped on I-25 on the left shoulder. He pulled up behind the car and went up to see if he could help. The driver was a teenage girl who had run out of gas. She seemed shaken up, so he asked, “How long have you been here?” She just got out the words, “Too long ” before she burst into tears. She said she didn’t know what to do, and didn’t know if anyone was ever going to stop and help her – cars were whizzing by at 75 mph, she was trapped there, there was no way to get off the highway, and she was scared to death. Josiah could tell she was shaken up, so he told her, “I won’t leave until you’re in a safe spot and you’re ok.” And that was the comfort she needed to calm down.

Now, she didn’t know Josiah from Adam. For all she knew, Josiah could have been some dangerous criminal – or so inept at his job that he couldn’t protect her at all. But still, the assurance that he wouldn’t leave her stranded alone on the highway was what she needed to be able to calm down and have some peace. And if that’s the case, just think of the peace that can flood our hearts when we realize that someone with infinite power and infinite wisdom and who loves us enough to die for us taps on our window and says, “Don’t worry, I won’t leave you alone.”

When you’re stressed out about life, don’t pretend you’re alone. Don’t pretend to be an orphan. Jesus taught us, when we’re worried or stressed, to look to the birds. Your Father in heaven takes care of them all day every day, are you not worth much more than a bird? Said the robin to the sparrow, “I should really like to know, why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so.” Said the sparrow to the robin, “Friend I think that it must be, that they have no heavenly Father, such as cares for you are me.”⁴

⁴ Elizabeth Cheney

Prayer

Thank you, dear Father, for always being with us. Any moment of any day, fellowship with You can be enjoyed. Not always to the same degree, but always enough to bring great comfort and joy. When my money is gone, You are there. When sleep escapes me, You are there with me, giving rest to my weary soul if I will only get out of bed and seek hard after You. When family is not around or does not live up to expectations, You are faithful. When I lose my job, You never stop providing. When the vacation is over, You are not over. If I go up to the heavens, You are there. If I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn and settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me; Your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even then Your hand will guide me; Your right hand will hold me fast.

Small Group Discussion

1. What are some examples from Scripture of times when someone prayed for one thing, and the opposite of that thing ended up being best?
2. What are some examples from your own life?