



SPECIAL  
EXCERPT  
FROM

HOW TO  
OVERCOME  
WORRY

EXPERIENCING THE PEACE OF GOD  
IN EVERY SITUATION

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## The Antidote to Worry

*But in everything by prayer and supplication with  
thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:6B

So is there any specific instruction from the Lord to those of us who are anxious? Yes! Paul tells us in the second part of Philippians 4:6 to take everything to the Lord in prayer. The next (and vital) step to overcoming worry is to pray. Pray about everything.

*We conquer worry by taking everything to the Lord in prayer.*

The second part of verse 6 begins with the conjunction *but*, which in the original Greek text is emphatic; it highlights the contrast between anxiety and

prayer. Prayer in everything is the antidote to worrying about anything.

In the phrase “but in everything,” the little word *in* has great practical significance for us. As we journey through life toward heaven, we find ourselves *in* various circumstances and situations. The situations and contexts of our lives will shift, vary, and change.

“In everything” means in *every* situation, in *every* circumstance, in *every* problem. It’s comprehensive, embracing life in all of its shifts and turns, highs and lows, and ups and downs!

We tend to live as if the situations in our lives are either too big or too trivial for God. Of course we may not admit it, but sometimes we act like our particular situation is too great for Him. If we had the resources, we

would step in and resolve the problem ourselves.

Or we bury our heads in the sand and try to ignore the harsh winds of difficulty blowing around us.

Alternatively, we may have the attitude that our

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circumstances are too trivial for God's interest. Or we may be so confused, so conflicted in our emotions, and so exhausted by intense mental and spiritual battles that we forget that even in these circumstances, prayer is appropriate and necessary. For all practical purposes, we are declaring our situation to be outside the influence of our God.

#### A MOTHER'S INFLUENCE

The death of my mother was one such circumstance for me. It suddenly seemed as if the years had passed at the speed of light. Just a moment before, I had been a six-year-old boy watching my mother walking up the hall and saying kindly, "Winfred, I am going to teach you how to pray." After kneeling beside me, she had tenderly instructed me how to converse with God. Now I was a middle-aged husband and father of four children standing beside a hospital bed, along with sixteen other relatives and close friends, watching my mother live her last few minutes on earth. Actually, we did more than watch. We participated in a painful and yet strangely glorious event—the homegoing of a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But my mother's last years on earth were difficult. She

had been ill for some time. She had a major heart attack in 1984, underwent open-heart surgery in 1992, and suffered from diabetes and congestive heart failure. Since she was having a serious problem with lethal abnormal heart rhythms, her doctors decided to place an implantable defibrillator in her chest. She agreed to have the procedure done, hoping the device would greatly improve the quality of her life. When she had an abnormal heart rhythm, the defibrillator administered an electric shock, converting her abnormal heart rhythm back to a normal one.

My mother was devastated to discover that the implantable defibrillator would not and could not meet her expectations. The first time the defibrillator administered a shock to her heart, she was scared, and she cried out in pain from the shocks. From time to time, her defibrillator would jolt her heart muscle with an electric shock. This went on for about a year. She was in the midst of a painful and scary ordeal. Eventually, her heart gave out. During the last few days of her life, her defibrillator was shocking her heart muscle regularly, sometimes every few minutes.

When she was hospitalized, I was sitting in a doctoral seminar at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. An administrator walked into the classroom and told me

that I needed to go to the hospital immediately. When I arrived at Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, Illinois, she was not doing well. As I sat talking to her, the defibrillator went off, and my precious mother grimaced in pain and arched her back because of the electric shock. Instinctively, we all wanted to touch and comfort her, but we could not for fear of being shocked ourselves. I stood there helpless, horrified, and stunned. My mother wanted the doctor to turn the defibrillator off; the frequency and intensity of the shocks were too much for her to bear. My siblings and I, in consultation with the doctors, decided to comply with her wishes.

When the doctor came into her room to turn off her defibrillator, he gently explained to her what he was doing. All sixteen of us stood around her bed and watched; it seemed as if we were standing on the edge of eternity. The nurse injected morphine into her IV line to ease the pain she would experience in a few minutes when the arrhythmias started. The doctor then left the room.

Uneasiness gripped me as we stood around my mother's bed. I wanted to say so many things to her but was unable. I knew she had only a few more minutes left on this side of heaven. Pain rose up in my chest. Suddenly

my daughter Rachel started singing a hymn, and we all joined in. Then my daughter Eden prayed. Then others began speaking up, offering a spontaneous reading of appropriate Scripture verses, saying earnest prayers on my mother's behalf, and singing some of the great hymns and choruses of the faith.

Then it happened—I looked at my mother's heart monitor and saw that the lethal abnormal heart rhythm had started. All we could do was stand there and watch as it ran its awful course. I grabbed my Bible and read Psalm 23 aloud as my mother grimaced in pain. Then we continued to sing, pray, and read Scripture as my mother was

being welcomed home to glory! The Holy Spirit filled that hospital room! God's presence was real, tangible, and comforting. In the midst of such pain and grief, we sensed God's glory and knew we were having a divine visitation. On her bed, my

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mother slightly turned her head to the left as I watched. She was gone.

I shed tears as I write. The whole scene moved the nurse deeply. Aware that he had just witnessed something extraordinary, he said, “I have never seen anything like this in my entire life.”

Our ability to pray and talk to God is one of the glories and privileges of being beside a saved loved one in their passing. Even in circumstances such as witnessing a loved one die, prayer is always appropriate, and it is a powerful testimony to the glory of God! Thanks be to God that we can talk with Him in a situation like this, and in fact in any situation or context, drawing strength and help, and harnessing heavenly resources through prayer.

#### A PRECIOUS PRIVILEGE

Prayer, then, in all of life, is one of the most effective, precious, life-transforming, and God-honoring means of grace that our heavenly Father has placed at our disposal. To be able to talk to our heavenly Father is one of the greatest privileges we have on earth! Prayer is conversation with God and is the means through which we draw



on the resources of heaven for our pain and struggles here on earth.

In the Bible, prayer was one of the means through which God's people obtained grace, help, wisdom, and strength from God. Consider the anguished prayer of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:10–11), the desperate prayer of Hezekiah (Isa. 38:2–3), the defiant prayers of Daniel (Dan. 6:6–13), the moving laments and confessions of the Psalms (see Pss. 22; 51). Consider the prayers of God's people to come in the tribulation (Rev. 5:8; 6:9–10) as well as the vibrant prayers of God's people in the book of Acts (1:14; 2:42; 4:23–31; 12:1–17; 13:1–3). J. B. Phillips said this about the first-century believers in his 1955 preface to Acts in *The New Testament in Modern English*:

It is impossible to spend several months in close study of the remarkable short book . . . without being profoundly stirred, and to be honest, disturbed. The reader is disturbed because he is seeing Christianity, *the real thing*, in action for the first time in human history. The newborn Church, as *vulnerable* as any human child, having

neither *money, influence* nor *power* in the ordinary sense, is setting forth *joyfully* and *courageously* to win the pagan world for Christ. Yet we cannot help feeling disturbed as well as moved, for this is surely the Church as it was meant to be. It is *vigorous* and *flexible*. . . . These men did not “say their prayers,” they really prayed. But if they were uncomplicated and naïve by modern standards, we have to admit that they were open on the Godward side in a way that is *almost unknown today*.<sup>1</sup> (emphasis added)

Prayer was one of the outstanding traits of our Lord’s life and ministry on earth. In Luke’s Gospel, the evangelist emphasizes His prayer life (see Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 23:34). Matthew and Mark narrate our Lord’s baptism and transfiguration, but Luke alone tells us that He prayed on these occasions. Luke says this about Jesus’ baptism:

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was *praying*, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove,

and a voice came out of heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.” (Luke 3:21–22, emphasis added)

Luke then recounts the incredible moments of our Lord’s transfiguration:

Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to *pray*. And while He was *praying*, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:28–31, emphasis added)

The Lord’s purpose in going up to the mountain was not to be transfigured but to pray, and while praying, He was transfigured. And who cannot be moved at the anguished prayer of the Lord Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane?

When He arrived at the place, He said to them, “*Pray that you may not enter into temptation.*” And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and began to *pray*, saying, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was *praying* very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. When He rose from *prayer*, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, and said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and *pray that you may not enter into temptation.*” (Luke 22:40–46, emphasis added)

Prayer was a vital part of Jesus’ life. Even on the cross while enveloped in supernatural darkness, before He bowed His sacred head, breathed His last, and voluntarily yielded up His spirit in death, prayer was on His sinless lips: “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Our Lord demonstrated to us that no matter how

dark it gets, prayer is still appropriate and necessary. It is quite possible that in our digital, high-tech, and secular world, with all of its scientific advances, we may underestimate the place and power of prayer in our lives as followers of Christ. Today, if we have an epidemic, an economic crisis, or some major technological setback, as a culture, we call on technocrats, scientists, or other experts to solve the problems of the environment and the human condition. The big idea of twenty-first-century life is to work the problem until we find a solution. God is not even a part of the problem-solving equation. In the ancient world, people called on God or idols, but twenty-first-century secular culture and mindset does not consider prayer to be a major part of a solution on earth. And because we live in a culture with this worldview, this mindset can seep into us and shape how we think about prayer.

Sensing how the culture was shaping the thinking of the church in 1961, A. W. Tozer wrote:

We are today suffering from a secularized mentality. Where the sacred writers saw God, we see laws of nature. Their world was fully populated;

ours is all but empty. Their world was alive and personal; ours is impersonal and dead. God ruled their world; ours is ruled by the laws of nature, and we are always once removed from the presence of God.<sup>2</sup>

In our world where people are once, twice, or perhaps three times removed from the presence of God through the so-called laws of nature, science, and digital technology, we may underestimate the place of prayer in our lives as Christians. But if we take the Bible seriously, it is clear that prayer should hold a big place in our lives today. It is key to the conquest of worry. This is why Paul is essentially saying in Philippians: but in everything by (the means of) prayer and (by the means of) supplication let your requests be known to God.

#### DIFFERENT KINDS OF PRAYER

Paul uses different terms for the different aspects of conversing with God: *prayer*, *supplication*, *thanksgiving*, and *requests*. The Greek word *προσευχῇ* that is translated *prayer* is the most general and the most frequently used

term for prayer in the New Testament. Prayer can be both personal and corporate and is a real, genuine conversation with God, marked by reverence and a worshipful attitude, as well as submission and trust. But in order to understand this verse, we must also explore the different facets of prayer.

### **Supplication**

Supplication is prayer that expresses our need before

God. To be human is to be needy. We are finite and limited. We do not know everything, and we are not all-wise. All of us need the Lord. The only one who exists without need is God. But we need Him desperately! Supplication is the means by which we express our need of Him, and our need of His power, presence, and wisdom.

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We come to God, or we are driven to Him, forced to our knees by the burden of life's circumstances, and in desperation we cry out to Him, expressing our need.

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In the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey becomes desperate when Uncle Billy misplaces a huge sum of the business's money. George is so worried that he begins to contemplate suicide. He makes his way to a restaurant and takes a seat at the bar. Lines of despair twist his face, his hair is uncombed, and he prays, "Dear Father in heaven, I'm not a praying man, but if you're up there and you can hear me, show me the way. I'm at the end of my rope. Show me the way, God."

We come to God, or we are driven to Him, forced to our knees by the burden of life's circumstances, and in desperation we cry out to Him, expressing our need. This is supplication.

## **Thanksgiving**

Thanksgiving means gratitude. Thanksgiving is the grateful acknowledgment that God exists, that He is good, and that He is sovereign. It is the thankful recognition of God for everything He has done, is doing, and will do on our behalf.

Thanksgiving will last forever, carrying on into eternity (Rev. 4:9; 7:12; 11:17). We won't fully understand how much we owe God until we set foot on the shores



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In giving God thanks, we are already moving out of the dark forest of worry and into the meadow of peace.

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of glory. But in the meantime, thankfulness should always accompany prayer and should be our posture in all life circumstances (Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18). In giving God thanks, we are already moving out of the dark forest of worry and into the meadow of peace.

### **Requests**

Requests are specific needs or things we ask God to grant us. Our requests are specific and contextual, arising out of real needs with the expectation of receiving real and definite help from God. When we are in anxiety-inducing circumstances, we should figure out what we need and take those needs to God in prayer.

In the Bible, Daniel and his three friends were in danger of losing their lives. The king had determined to kill off the wise men of Babylon, including Daniel and his three friends. The situation was charged with anxiety. But what did Daniel and his friends do?

Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter, so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. (Dan. 2:17–18)

The Lord granted them their request, and the interpretation of the dream was revealed to Daniel. Daniel responds by giving God thanks and praise for granting his specific request: “To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom and power; even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, for You have made known to us the king’s matter” (Dan. 2:23).

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When we are in anxiety-inducing circumstances, we should figure out what we need and take those needs to God in prayer.

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In the book of 1 Chronicles, we are reminded of this aspect of prayer in the middle of a genealogy list. We are told that Jabez specifically asked God to do several things in his life: “Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, ‘Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it might not pain me!’” (4:10). The chronicler then adds, “And God granted him what he requested” (4:10c).

In David’s messianic psalm, the Lord says to us as co-heirs with Christ: “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession” (Ps. 2:8). When we lack wisdom in life’s trials, we are told to ask Him for wisdom. He also commands us to ask in faith with the promise that wisdom will be granted to us (James 1:5–8). Similarly, the Lord Jesus encourages us to ask God for what we need. He says:

*Ask*, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who *asks* receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son *asks*

for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he *asks* for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who *ask* Him! (Matt. 7:7–11, emphasis added)

In the above passage, *asking* is compared to *seeking* and *knocking*. At first glance, it seems that the imperatives to “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” are actions that we do once before leaving the matter with the Lord. But all these verbs are present imperatives and therefore convey the idea of continuous action: keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. The continuous action of the verbs grows in intensity and focus.

In a sermon on Luke 11:9–10, the British preacher Charles Spurgeon talked about asking, seeking, and knocking as three levels of depth in prayer:

Now observe that these varieties of prayer are put on an ascending scale. It is said first that we ask—I suppose that refers to the prayer which is a mere statement of our needs in which we tell

the Lord that we need this and that and ask Him to grant it to us. But as we learn the art of prayer we go on further to seek—which signifies that we marshal our arguments and plead reasons for the granting of our desires—and we begin to wrestle with God for the mercies needed. And if the blessings come not, we then rise to the third degree which is knocking—we become importunate—we are not content with asking and giving reasons, but we throw the whole earnestness of our being into our requests and practice the text which says, “the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force.”<sup>3</sup>

The Lord Jesus stresses the need for our persistence, perseverance, and earnestness in asking. In addition, we are told in Matthew 7:7 that those who habitually ask will receive; those who habitually seek will find; and to those who habitually knock, it shall be opened. Our heavenly Father is the request-granting God. God answers prayer.

It’s important to add that there is a danger of misusing this promise as *carte blanche* for selfish requests (James 4:3). Jesus is talking about making our requests with

God-honoring motives.

Perhaps one of the reasons we do not make specific requests in the midst of our anxiety is that we are not expecting our heavenly Father to actually answer prayer. In

*With Christ in the School of Prayer*, Andrew Murray points out one of the symptoms of a deep illness of practical atheism in the church. He writes:

One of the terrible marks of the diseased state of Christian life these days is that there are so many who are content *without distinct the experience of answer to prayer*. They pray daily, they *ask* many things, and they trust that some of them will be heard. But they know little of direct definite answer to prayer as the rule of daily life. . . . Prayer is supposed to have an answer.<sup>4</sup> (emphasis added)

Therefore, expecting answers from God in the midst of anxiety, we let our requests be made known to Him

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True prayer is expecting God to do something, looking for His answers.

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when we need wisdom for facing a particular issue. In the various scenarios of our lives, we are to intentionally think through what we want God to provide, and then ask Him—humbly, fervently, expectantly, and persistently.

These are requests. They are specific and arise out of real needs and concerns. God's children expect their Father to answer. True prayer is not just getting on our knees, uttering pious platitudes, or engaging in therapeutic mystical babbling. Rather, it is expecting God to do something, looking for His answers. By the means of prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, we make our requests known to God.

#### TRUSTING AND TALKING TO GOD THROUGH TURBULENCE

The words “to God” are more significant than they seem. The directive to make our requests known to God does not mean that God was previously uninformed. He knows all things past, present, future, potential—completely and exhaustively. Tozer writes:

God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, every plurality and all plurality, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible, and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell.<sup>5</sup>

But our God is not an omniscient computer or an infinite Mr. Spock. His omniscience is a caring omniscience. Tozer captures this well:

Our Father in heaven knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. He knew our inborn treachery, and for His own sake engaged to save us (Isa. 48:8–11). His only begotten Son, when He walked among us, felt our pains in their naked intensity of anguish. His knowledge of our afflictions and adversities is more than theoretic; it is



personal, warm, and compassionate. Whatever may befall us, God knows and cares as no one else can.<sup>6</sup>

Our all-knowing heavenly Father wants us to trust Him and depend on Him. The fact that our Father already knows our needs and cares is a major incentive for

believing prayer and trust in Him (Matt. 6:32–33). He wants us to talk to Him, sharing our hearts and needs and troubles with Him.

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Prayer is one of the most vital expressions of our trust in and dependence on God.

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When you take that final step onto an airplane, you are placing your life in the hands of the pilot, crew, and flight attendants. There is

much that we may not understand about aviation, air currents, plane engines, and everything else involved in flying, but we buckle our seat belt and settle in for the flight as a matter of faith. Sometimes we fly through turbulence, and we feel the plane and ourselves shaking at the high altitude! If we need help or reassurances, we call on the

flight attendant, and they help us. We trust that they can.

Similarly, prayer is one of the most vital expressions of our trust in and dependence on God. God our Father is the pilot! We are not just souls on the plane of faith; we are His children. By His grace and power, we will reach our destination: glory. He is also sovereign and all-powerful. He is in control of the turbulence, and every bit of turbulence that we feel on the flight of faith is either permitted or sent directly by Him for His glory and our good! We can, therefore, call on Him in faith. In faith, we tell Him about all of our worrisome problems and turbulent circumstances. We humble ourselves and give all our cares and worries to the Lord (1 Peter 5:7). Do you remember the words of the famous hymn?

What a Friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!<sup>7</sup>

This hymn reminds us of the privilege and benefit of carrying everything to the Lord in prayer. We see the same call to prayer in our key passage. Notice how the

passage reads: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Let’s not give God the silent treatment.

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Edited by Connor Sterchi

Interior design: Ragont Design

Cover design: Erik M. Peterson

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Neely, Winfred, author.

Title: How to overcome worry : experiencing the peace of God in every situation /  
Dr. Winfred Neely.

Description: Chicago : Moody Publishers, 2017.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016056892 (print) | LCCN 2017007847 (ebook) | ISBN 9780802415042 |  
ISBN 9780802495181

Subjects: LCSH: Worry—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Anxiety—Religious  
aspects—Christianity. | Peace of mind—Religious aspects—Christianity. |  
Bible. Philippians, IV, 6-7—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: LCC BV4908.5 .N44 2017 (print) | LCC BV4908.5 (ebook) | DDC  
248.8/6--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016056892>

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1 3 5 7 9 1 0 8 6 4 2