Outgrowing Anxiety Part 1: Saying Goodbye to Plastic Prayer

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Date: 23 September 2025 Preacher: Chris Oswald

[0:00] Good morning, church. My name is Chris Oswald. I am the pastor in Kansas City, Kansas, in the middle of the United States.

! I don't know if anyone has heard of Patrick Mahomes. Has anyone heard of Taylor Swift? Her fiance plays football in my town.

Travis Kelsey? I have been a pastor for about 30 years. I've been married for 30 years. I have three adult children and two sons-in-laws and a daughter-in-law.

And I am going to talk to you this morning about worry and anxiety. I have thought for many years about this subject and struggled with these particular sins and have seen the Lord give me much grace in recent years, even as my life has become more complicated and I have more people to love and more people to worry about.

The Lord has given me grace to grow in the area of stress and anxiety. If you'll open your Bibles to the book of Philippians, chapter 4, verse 6 and 7 will be our text this morning.

Philippians chapter 4, verses 6 through 7. I have to say that when I was a child growing up in the church, I was a bit confused.

I knew that there was a book in the Bible called the Philippians. And I knew that there were some islands called the Philippines. And in my mind as a 10-year-old boy, I thought that this is where this book came from.

So the 10-year-old version of me is very impressed that he is preaching on Philippians in the home of the Philippians.

Philippians 4, 6 through 7 says, I thought this morning about preaching about this particular topic because a Filipino friend in the United States told me, do you know, Pastor Chris, why the men of the Philippines have such large calf muscles?

And I said, why is that? And he said, from carrying the weight of their parents' expectations. Certainly, we are living in a busy and complicated world.

[3:04] Where many pressures press in on us. Many expectations. Many fears of missing out. Life has become more complicated than it was even when I was a child.

And so I want to walk with you this morning through what I believe is God's kind antidote to this poison of worry and anxiety.

But I do want to say, not that I think any of you feel this way, but I can imagine someone thinking, oh, listen to this man coming from America, this soft American in the land of opportunity, flying halfway around the world to tell the Filipinos not to worry.

Easy, easy for him to say. But I want to say that it's not me saying it. It's the Apostle Paul. And he is not saying it from America.

He is saying it from prison. This is an important fact to keep in mind as you read this text. The man who is telling us through the power of the Holy Spirit not to worry is in prison.

[4:22] He is facing death as he does almost daily. So this is a message for everyone who's suffering less than him, which I think is everyone in this room.

What I believe God is saying through this particular scripture is that we are not to worry, but to do something else. And so we have three points for this particular message.

God speaking through the imprisoned apostle is ordering me, ordering me a command not to worry. And he is offering me a way of escape from this particular sin.

He is giving me an order. Do not worry. And he is giving me an offer. Do this instead. Do you see the order in the text?

Philippians 4, 6. Do not be anxious about anything. Do not be anxious about anything. I use the word order as in command.

[5:33] I never served in the military, but one of my children did. And many of my friends have served in the military. I even have some friends that have served in the special forces in the United States military.

And I like the word order more than command, simply because as Christians, we hear the word command and commandment, and we internally sometimes think suggestion, as if God is giving us a suggestion that we ought not to worry.

But no, the God of the universe is standing before us in his word and commanding us and ordering us not to worry. It's not only in Philippians 4, 6, where God orders us not to worry.

The Bible is full of this particular command. Jesus repeatedly tells his followers not to be anxious, not to be anxious about what they will eat or drink, not to be anxious about what they will wear, not to be anxious about tomorrow.

He tells his followers to fear not, for it is the Father's goodwill to give them the kingdom. He tells his followers, do not let your hearts be troubled.

[6:52] And so this command that God is giving us, this order not to worry about anything, is not found in only one place. Many places all over the scripture.

In fact, there's a proverb that says, trust in the Lord with all your heart. Well, if I'm worrying, am I obeying God's command to trust in him with all my heart?

So that's the order we see. Do not worry about anything. And then we see an offer. Isn't it kind of the Lord, not only to tell us what not to do, but to give us a way of escape from this particular command.

That's 1 Corinthians 10, 13. No temptation has overtaken you, but such that is common to man, that text says. And God is faithful.

He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability to endure it, but give you a way of escape. And so God is not only coming to us this morning and saying, I command you, do not worry.

[8:03] He is also saying, do this instead. So the first point of our message today is the order, do not worry. And the second point of our message is the offer, do this instead.

And we see in our text the following offer. But in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Point one, the order. Point two, the offer. And we see a third thing, the outcome. Do you see that in the text? Look back at your Bibles, please.

In Philippians 4, 6 through 7, the command, do not be anxious. The offer instead to let your prayers be known about everything. And what is the outcome?

Do you see that? The outcome, if you do this, if you obey the command and you take my offer, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[9:07] So this is very simple. I think most of us have read this verse before. I knew about this verse for many years. In those same years, I worried a great deal.

I've been a pastor for a very long time. Being a pastor brings all sorts of reasons to worry, financial and spiritual and so on and so forth. Why was it for so many years?

I knew about this verse, but I could not stop worrying. I knew what the Bible told me to do. I still struggled to obey. Is anyone here in a similar situation?

You know that God wants you not to worry. You know the offer to pray without ceasing stands, but you're finding it difficult to do what the word tells you to do in this particular case.

If you're struggling like that, I'm right there with you. But I want to tell you that I didn't give up by God's grace, and I kept meditating on this.

You know, quickly, friends, as an aside, sometimes I think we are tempted when we see God telling us to do something or not to do something, and we try very hard, and we don't succeed.

We can't do what He's calling us to do. I think many times we are tempted to think, well, then maybe this thing He's saying to do isn't so important, or maybe this sin that He's calling me to stop isn't so bad.

But God, thankfully, gave me the faith to believe His Word, and so I kept having to say, no, God wants me to stop this, but I can't stop this.

And what's going on? How can't I stop this? Why can't I? God, please help me. And I want to share with you today a story through the Bible, the things that I learned in God's Word that helped me to pivot out of this season, this very long season, most of my life.

Since I was a child, I was a worrier. That's a very annoying child, by the way. Has anyone had a worrying child? They're not that fun to be around.

[11:24] That was me. But the Lord has given me great grace in this area, and I want to share that with you. I want to explain how He taught me how to overcome this particular sin.

I don't want to just tell you this is what you should do, because that's not how I learned. I learned through tracing God's Word, and eventually the light turned on.

And so I want to try to help you with that today. Here's what began to change for me. I noticed that the Apostle Paul often spoke in a particular way.

And I noticed this at first in Ephesians 5, verse 18. Would you turn there real quickly? We'll be in Ephesians for a couple of verses.

Ephesians 5, 18. This has nothing to do with worry exactly. This was just teaching me to think like the Apostle Paul. He writes here, Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.

[12:33] Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was a verse that began to teach me to think like the Apostle Paul, because I noticed that he... When I read this verse, I thought, What does drunkenness have to do with the Holy Spirit?

Why is Paul talking about these two things together? And I begin to realize that what he was saying here is that drunkenness is a cheap substitute for being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Drunkenness is a way to feel happy for a moment, to have a kind of joy, to have a kind of lightened heart, to be a little carefree, the Holy Spirit is the real version of this.

So I was dealing with this idea of the counterfeit and the real. When I flew into Manila at this time, I had a couple days all to myself.

[13:42] Never happens in my life. My life is usually full of meetings, and I really wanted to have a couple days to myself. And so I stayed close to the airport, and I love to walk.

I take walks all the time. And because I'm a large guy, I usually feel pretty safe wherever I walk. And this allows me to be a little bit more adventurous as I travel around the world, and I can walk into places that some people maybe wouldn't walk.

So on one walk, on one single day, I saw a Rolex watch that was selling for over a million pesos.

I think it was closer to two million pesos. And then I walked in a different part of town, and I saw a Rolex for 1,000 pesos.

When I began to understand that Paul often talked about the real thing and the fake thing, this was the beginning of the end for my life of worry.

[14:55] I saw another place in Ephesians where Paul did a similar thing. In Ephesians 4.28, Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Let's think again about the substitutes, the counterfeits. Here, a person wants to have nice things, and the cheap counterfeit, the wrong way to go about those things, is to steal.

And Paul is saying, don't do it the wrong way, do it the right way. Work hard with your hands if you want to have nice things. So now we have two things, drunkenness versus the Holy Spirit, the counterfeit versus the real thing, stealing versus working hard with your hands, the counterfeit thing, the wrong way, and the right way.

And then I begin to see what Paul was telling us in Philippians 4. There is a wrong way to think, which is to worry, and a right way to think, which is to pray.

There is a wrong way to use our brains, and a right way to use our brains. This idea of the fake and the real, or the wrong and the right, began to really work in my heart.

[16:21] It reminded me almost immediately of Jeremiah 2. Jeremiah 2, verses 12 through 13. Be appalled, O heavens, at this.

Be shocked. Be utterly desolate, declares the Lord. For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Do you know what cisterns, English cisterns? It's often a hole that holds rainwater. It's not a well, because a well is connected to living water.

A cistern holds old water. And God is saying here that my people have committed two great evils. They've forsaken me, the living water, and instead they're trying to drink out of this broken, old, stale, bad water.

Again, the right way and the wrong way, the counterfeit and the true. These ideas begin to stack up on top of each other.

[17:36] And I begin to realize that worry is the broken cistern of thinking, and that prayer is the living water of thinking.

Another example, Isaiah 55.2. Why do you spend money? This is God pleading with us. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen diligently to me. Eat what is good, and delight yourself in rich foods. Now I begin to have a more full understanding of what Paul was talking about related to worry and prayer.

Worry is a broken cistern. Prayer is living water. Worry is the bread of anxious toil. Prayer is a filling meal. So this is fundamentally what changed for me.

This was God's offer. Chris, stop praying to yourself. I begin to realize that's what worry is. Worry is fake prayer.

[18:46] Worry is counterfeit prayer. It is praying to the God of self. Prayer is living water. Worry is cistern thinking.

Prayer is bread that satisfies. Worry is bread that does not satisfy. Paul was calling us in Philippians to use our minds, and all of those thoughts we're having about what could happen today, and will we be able to pay the electric bill, and will this person be nice, or will they be mean, and what about my relative who is sick?

Paul is teaching us that all of those thoughts should be prayers to God, not prayers to ourselves. on a recent trip in a different state, my wife insisted that we go to a modern art gallery that she had seen on the internet.

And so I didn't want to go, but I did because I am an amazing husband. And we go into this place, and friends, no.

It wasn't like an art gallery. It was like a grocery store. I'm not joking. It was built like a grocery store. Only everything on the shelves was just fake food.

[20:14] It was all just plastic food. I paid good money to go into a place and look at plastic food. It was plastic bananas, plastic meat, plastic soda cans.

I did not let my wife live this down for quite some time. We paid our money to look at plastic food? Friends, worry is plastic prayer.

It's not good for us. It has the same basic shape as prayer, only it isn't connected to the living God.

But this is when things begin to take shape for me. It was with great compassion that God, through the imprisoned apostle, had him say to you and to me thousands of years later, you really must stop praying to yourself.

you must start praying to God in all things, at all times. Worry is not only a broken cistern that we drink from.

[21:32] There are many things. Friends, I want to take a moment and just let's stop talking about worry just for one moment. Do you understand, friends, that this is what sin is?

Sin is exchanging the goodness of God for something that we have convinced ourselves is better.

And do you understand that it never is better? Do you understand, friends, that why God is a jealous God? Because we keep trading him for the most terrible, foolish, and lesser things.

Worry is just one example where we trade a conversation with the living God for a conversation with ourselves that goes nowhere. Every sin you and I commit is that.

It's trading the goodness of walking with the God of the universe for something so much less.

[22:44] It's poison and it's bad for us and it's offensive to God. This is why it would be totally appropriate for God to turn his back on us. Not only do we keep walking away from him, but we keep trading him for things that are terrible and have no point and are bad for us and bad for others.

We keep making this terrible exchange and it would be fair for God to turn his back on us, but instead he responds to our terrible exchange with a great exchange.

God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son to interrupt my cycles of cistern drinking, of plastic prayers, of counterfeits.

He interrupted all of this with the Lord Jesus Christ living a perfectly righteous life and paying the penalty for my many sins of exchange.

In this room today, we have people who have exchanged truth for lies and God's word for worldly opinions and love for lust.

[24:10] We have people who have exchanged generosity for greed and the Holy Spirit for substance abuse and have exchanged marriage for friends with benefits and have exchanged speaking the truth in love for timidity and flattery.

All of us live lives of repeated exchange where we walk away from the real thing and take up the fake thing.

And I am just at that age where I can hardly describe without crying how good it is of God to interrupt these things and to give us his son to take on our sin and to give us his righteousness.

And so friends, we're going to resume talking about worry, but I needed to take a moment and say, if you have not given your life to the Lord Jesus, you need to do this.

Even today, you need to do this. This is the way, the truth and the life and the way out of living a counterfeit, fake, plastic life and begin living an abundant life.

[25:32] When I gave my life to Jesus, he set me on a path of the true and the good and the beautiful. And there are still things in my life where I'm eating plastic fruit.

Worry would be one of those. And so not only was God faithful to save me, but he's been faithful to sanctify me. He's been faithful to chase after me when I'm still engaging like an old sinner and saying, Chris, no, no, no, no, no.

This is not for you. I have done something so much better for you. And so to give away the ending of my story, God changed me from a man who had a big worry life and a small prayer life into a man who had a big prayer life and a small worry life.

And it was because he showed me that worry was basically praying to myself. It was praying to myself about things I couldn't change instead of praying to a God about things he could easily and would readily change.

A big part of this breakthrough for me came down to understanding that my mind could be used for good or for bad.

[27:01] And again, I know that sounds simple. But understanding that my mind could be used for good or for bad. You know, Pilgrim's Progress is a wonderful book.

I don't know if you've read it. I did check. It is available in Tagalog. And there's actually a really good cartoon version of it on YouTube in Tagalog.

I checked this morning. In Pilgrim's Progress, the hero, the central figure of the story is a man named Christian.

And he is caught by the giant despair. And friends, it is not very far away from worry and anxiety to despair. I've been there. He is caught by the giant despair and he's held in a castle called Doubting Castle.

And the giant routinely beats him with a club, a club called Memory, Remembering.

[28:07] And Christian is reminded of all the sins of his past and all of his mistakes and all of his failings. And he's caught in the castle of despair.

And then one day he realizes that he has a key, the promises of God in his pocket, and that that key can open up the cell door and he can escape the prison.

And what I love about that passage, friends, is that the devil was using Christian's memory to hurt him, but the Holy Spirit used his memory to help him.

This is when I begin to really see the difference. I begin to realize that my mind can be used to worry or to pray.

those are my choices. That God made this mind to be able to talk to him, not to be able to talk to myself.

[29:13] And I begin to see that really, in some sense, over the years, my worry life was like writing a bunch of letters and never addressing them to anyone, just setting them on my desk and they would pile up.

They were never sent anywhere. And I begin to realize that all of these letters could be turned into prayers. That I would still wonder how my child was going to do with their latest illness

I would still worry about my wife as she traveled to this place. I would still worry about my church. These thoughts would still come into my head. But the simplest thing, I'm embarrassed to admit, dawned on me one day.

Those are just prayers lacking a dear father at the beginning. And please help me at the end. Really, all worry is is just a bunch of emails you've got in your draft folder that you never typed out togodatjesuschrist.org.

That's what Paul is saying in this passage. He's saying, don't worry about anything. Pray about everything. So I want to suggest to you that we understand now the order very clearly and the offer seems to make much more sense.

[30:50] And I want to get you as far down the road toward the outcome as is possible. But I also want you to know one sermon is not going to change your life in this area. It's going to start changing your life in this area.

Okay? You know, growing up, we never had nice cars. And so that meant for the most part, as we drove cars around, we would have the check engine light on.

And that meant that something's wrong with the engine. And you kind of learn to ignore that over time if you don't have the money to fix it. You just treat it as a little decoration.

I drew a little happy face around mine with a Sharpie. Friends, let me be very, I don't mean this in any condemning way. If you are a worrier, this is a check engine light to tell you you need to work on your prayer life.

This is what this is. Don't feel condemned by that. But this is what God's doing with your worrying. He's telling you, it's a check engine light, and He's telling you your prayer life isn't what it needs to be.

Now, I don't think that anyone here probably feels like their prayer life is what it needs to be. But I will tell you that if you leave this service today and you decide I want to receive mentorship on prayer, I want to learn about prayer, I want to write down my prayers more frequently, I want to take time before I pray to think about how to pray, if you will just take some time every day to grow in your prayer life, I believe that you will be in the situation I am in where I have a relatively big prayer life and a relatively small worry life, the exact opposite of what I had at the beginning of this journey.

Let me say this another way. As I was flying over here, I was thinking about worry. This sermon came about because someone at my church back in Kansas City asked me to preach a sermon on this and so I haven't actually preached this at my church yet, you're the first ones to hear it but I was thinking about it on the flight and I was thinking about, I made up a story in my head about a stubborn woman who had little kids and a dog maybe and she was stubborn in all sorts of ways but in this particular way, she had a broom that just wasn't working anymore.

It was very worn down. There were many holes in the, whatever this is called, the fingers, there were many holes in the broom. The handle was broken and she's just this kind of stubborn woman.

I think we all know these people. It's a little cheap. She just couldn't go out and buy an inexpensive broom to replace it and so over time, her floors just kept getting dirtier and dirtier and she would sweep every day like she had done for years but her floors just would get a little dirtier and dirtier.

Her broom just wasn't what it needed to be. Friends, over time, if you don't have a good prayer life, your heart will get more and more cluttered with the cares of this world and maybe at one point, your broom was really good.

[34:18] Maybe there's a season in your life where your prayer broom worked quite well but maybe now it doesn't and what I'm inviting you to do, what I think the apostle is inviting you to do is to understand actually this is a problem that God cares about.

He loves you very much. He doesn't like seeing you drink from the broken cistern and he's telling you let's go get you a new broom. That won't be today.

God's not just going to drop a broom into your life. You need to build a prayer life. It's worth it but you can do this and you can see all of these letters that were piling up on your desk going nowhere become a daily pattern of conversing with the God of the universe.

Friends, you know, I grew up in a Catholic home or a family, extended family in a Catholic town and I won't get into all of that today but I think we probably have some of that in common.

Can I just say praise the Lord Jesus that I can go to God directly in prayer and not through 15 different saints like I'm flying in an airline and going through TSA and the black...

[35:43] Praise God that I can go to the God of the universe in Christ Jesus and call him Father and ask him for things and that's what this imprisoned apostle is telling us to do.

Why would you be anxious when the one who made the stars has given you his only begotten son so that you could call him Father and ask him for things?

I learned eventually that this command, this call was God's fatherly invitation to do what the apostle Peter says.

Cast all your anxieties on him for he cares for you. Now, I want to give you one final hint in my journey.

Paul says here to offer up prayers, supplications, make your requests be made known to God but then he adds something there in verse 6.

But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. This is the final tip on how to build a better broom.

It is interesting that the apostle adds with thanksgiving and I think he does that for at least one reason. It is not good for us to only look at today's challenges and tomorrow's challenges without also looking at yesterday's victories.

memories. It's not good for us to only be people who are mindful of what is unknown or what could be and forget all his benefits as Psalm 103 discusses.

So I would say that as you're building your prayer life, as you're making a better prayer broom to clean all the cares of your heart, don't forget to look back and see how many times the Lord God has cared for you in ways you might not have even noticed.

A healthy prayer life is actually full of thanksgiving. A healthy prayer life is actually full of praise. And so I'd leave you with that final tip to say as you're building up your prayer life, make sure it is thoroughly seasoned.

thoroughly seasoned with thanksgiving. Well, I want to leave you with an experience that I had as I left the Philippines last February. I wanted to bring my kids and my wife something from, you know, a souvenir of some kind.

And so I went into the store and looked around. There were all sorts of things I wanted to get, but I was worried that on the journey a lot of the things that I wanted to buy would be broken.

I'm very clumsy and I think that all those people that handle our luggage are trying to destroy things. I just didn't feel like I could get anything super nice, you know, and put it in the suitcase.

But I found these little tote bags and they had jeepneys on them and I think jeepneys are awesome, by the way. I wouldn't fit in one, but I think they're great. And so I bought these kind of canvas tote bags with screen printed manila imagery on them and I bought one for my mother and my wife and my daughters.

They all loved them. I used them all the time. But I did that because I couldn't get them anything too nice. I just felt like it would get broken. Can I just leave you with one encouraging truth from walking with the Lord?

[39:41] God is the only person who not only protects what he carries, but improves it as he carries it. It's not just that God will keep you from getting broken.

He will make you better as he carries you. It's sort of like as if I had packed those simple little canvas bags into my suitcase and they had gone into the airplane and thrown from this airplane to that airplane and been at 30,000 feet and back down to sea level multiple states, multiple countries across an ocean.

It's as if I put those simple little canvas bags in the luggage and when I got back home they were designer purses. Do you know that that's what God's going to do for you?

Do you know that that's what he's going to do for you? He will not only carry you, he will improve you as he carries you. He will not only protect you, he will purify you as he protects you.

He will improve you as he protects you. And so, my goodness, why are we talking to ourselves when we can be talking to this great God who is so worthy of our prayer and our trust and our praise?

[41:07] let me pray for us. Father God, I pray that through your Holy Spirit you would in your very fatherly way strengthen, confirm, and establish hearts this morning.

May you set many free from this tedious, plastic, praying, self-talk and fill all of that with the sweet joy of walking and talking with the heavenly father every moment of every day.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, Pastor, for that wonderful word.

Shall we all arise for our response? It's a good thing to be remembered that as we approach our Abba Father, we can approach him because of his mercy through Christ.

So as we sing this song, let us meditate on that truth. Jesus, your mercy is all my plea.

[42:40] I have no defense, my guilt runs too deep. The best of my worst feels your hands and your feet.

Jesus, your mercy is all my pain. my boast.

Your mercy is all my boast. The goodness I blame, the grounds of my hope. Whatever I lack is still what I need most.

of my boast. Jesus, your mercy is all my boast. Praise the King who bore my sins, took my place when I stood condemned.

Oh, how good you've always been to me. I will sing of your mercy.

[44:08] Jesus, your mercy is all my rest. When fears laid me down and enemies friends.

A comfort I bring to in life and in death. Jesus, your mercy is all my rest.

So we praise the King. Praise the King who bore my sin. Took my place when I stood for love Oh, how good you've always been to me I will sing of your mercy Jesus, your mercy is all my joy Forever I lift my heart and my love To sing of attraction no power can destroy Jesus, your mercy is all my joy

Praise the King who bore my sin Took my place when I stood condemned Oh, how good you've always been to me I will sing Praise the King who bore my sin Took my place when I stood condemned Oh, how good you've always been to me I will sing of your mercy alguém alquém alguém alquém alguém alguém