

Good morning! My name is John and I'm happy to be to share God's Word with you this morning. It's good to be back home here in Quito. We want to thank you for praying for me this past year as I've needed to focus on my health needs. In answer to your prayers, I did not need to have open heart surgery. God was merciful to me in many ways through this whole process. There were times of waiting, discouragement, and even depression. Yet God was faithful to me during this past year. So, from the bottom of my heart, literally ☺, thank you!

I arrived back in Quito late Tuesday night. Since arriving, I've had the opportunity to hear the testimonies of what God is doing here at EFC. It has been such an encouragement to hear how God is working through many of your lives. Since I left last year, many physical changes have happened at the church too: the parking lot, the new carpet, the new bulletin boards in the back are just a few of the obvious physical changes that have happened. But most important are the changes that have happened in people's lives. Even though I was not here physically, I stayed connected on all the WhatsApp ministry threads and was aware of what God was doing this past year. I was blessed to see that many of you followed the Lord in believer's baptism and went through the membership class. As a member of the elder team, I had the privilege of reading through many of your testimonies of salvation and God's working in your lives. And now that I have returned, I look forward to walking along side of you in this journey called life as we walk and grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Starting today and going through the next several weeks, we will be going through a sermon series on prayer. What is prayer? How often do you pray? What do you pray about? Do you have confidence that Almighty God will answer your prayers? What motivates you to pray? It is probably not the good times. Maybe fear, pain, suffering, or heartache. What hinders your prayers? God will not answer your prayers if there is sin in your life.

Last year I sat in a doctor's office here in Quito when he said to me, "John, you're going to die. You have a heart condition that is very serious. You need an invasive type of open-heart surgery that is not available here in Ecuador, so you need to return to the United States and have it done there, since there are surgeons there that specialize in that type of surgery.

That was the beginning of an emotional roller-coaster for me. We needed to sell everything here in Quito, all of our material belongings, and prepare for what could possibly happen. There were contingency plans to be made, family members to visit, and legal documents left in order just in case something would happen. Some

of you might remember before I left last year that I asked for one prayer request of you. It wasn't that God would heal me. It wasn't that a miracle would happen. The one prayer request that I asked of you was to pray that God would give me joy, joy through the dark journey that I was to take. I knew in my heart that healing would come through either medical intervention or by entering the presence of Jesus. That was never a doubt in my mind. But the one that I wanted was to have joy. Because without joy, the journey would have been depressing.

Are you there today? I mean, during some dark circumstance in your life. Are you wondering what God is doing in your life? Are you wondering what you are going through whatever circumstances that you are going through? The stress, the loneliness, the frustration, the numbness that is happening in your life.

While going through those dark days, God brought to me these verses and I want to share them with you today. These are verses that I have read many times throughout the years, but for some reason, they jumped off the page and hit me straight in the face. God used these verses to help me focus on prayer in my life.

Please open your bibles to Philippians 4:4-7. We'll be reading this passage in the New Living Translation.

***<sup>4</sup> Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.<sup>[a]</sup>***

***<sup>6</sup> Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. <sup>7</sup> Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.***

The Apostle Paul write that we should be full of joy. Why would he say that? You may think, that's great for Paul, but he doesn't have a clue what I'm going through right now. He's probably on vacation on the beach of some Greek island drinking lemonade of something. Enjoying the nice breeze of the Mediterranean Sea or something.

Let's look where Paul was and what he was doing when he wrote this passage. Paul was in a Roman prison. He was chained beside a Roman officer stuck in some dark space. He wasn't necessarily enjoying life at a fancy hotel or eating the most delicious of Roman cuisine at this moment. He was in prison for preaching the

Gospel. He was far from loved ones, from his family and brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet, he took time to tell them to have joy. Joy is not some emotion that we can manufacture. It is not a byproduct of some event or happening in your life. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and joy only comes by spending time with Almighty God. When we spend time with Him, the Bible says that they fruit, or manifestation of the Spirit is joy. Paul had joy in his life even though he was bound in a Roman prison. He probably wasn't too happy about that, but he had joy. An inner peace and contentment in his life that God was with him, and that God would fulfill whatever plan He had for his life.

If you want to have joy, peace, and contentment in your life while you are going through the darkest moments of your life, you must spend time with God. You must make it a priority. I don't mean that you must spend time with God because of a religious obligation or a ritual performance that must be done. What I mean is that you get alone with God and have a conversation with Him. You see, prayer is a relational conversation with the eternal God, creator of the universe. God wants to have a personal relationship with you.

In many religious belief systems around the world, the deities do not love their subjects and don't desire to have a personal relationship with them. It normally is the complete opposite. One must pay homage to a deity or suffer some type of punishment or judgement. But with God, the creator of heaven and earth, God wants to know you personally and involved in every part of your life.

That was the original plan when God created Adam and Eve. The Bible tells us that God spend time with Adam and Eve until one day, God came into the Garden of Eden and found Adam and Eve hiding from Him. Adam and Eve had sinned, and they tried to cover the sin and shame with something of their own means, their own abilities. The consequence of that sin was death. Instead of killing Adam and Eve on the spot, something died in their place. Blood was shed in consequence of their disobedience to Him. That event was known as a substitutional sacrifice. Because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, their relationship with a holy God was broken. They tried to distance themselves from Him. But God in His great mercy, provided coverings from an animal that had died in their place. A divine plan of redemption was revealed and God Himself took the initiative to restore that relationship. That plan was for His son Jesus Christ to die in your place and pay for your sin. When you place your trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, that relationship with God can be restored in your life and you can pray with confidence that your prayers will be answered.

The Bible tells us in *John 14:6*, “***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, but through me.***”

Now let’s return to our text in *Philippians 4*.

***<sup>4</sup> Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.<sup>[e]</sup>***

***<sup>6</sup> Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. <sup>7</sup> Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.***

The Bible tells us in the passage, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.” For me, that is really hard for me because I really like to worry. If you know me, you know that I’m a driven person and like to have things all prepared and in order. I like to have information and plan out all the details of life. I even have contingency plans for each detail, and contingency plans for the contingency plans that may happen. It is in my nature to worry. I worry about finances, work, health, family, the future, all the things that you worry about too.

In the Sermon on the Mount in the book of Matthew, Jesus talks about worry. He even tells us not to worry. Let’s look at what Jesus said in *Matthew 6:25-34*. Again, I’m reading from the New Living Translation:

***<sup>25</sup> “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are? <sup>27</sup> Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?***

***<sup>28</sup> “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing,<sup>29</sup> yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. <sup>30</sup> And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?***

*<sup>31</sup> “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. <sup>33</sup> Seek the Kingdom of God<sup>[e]</sup> above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*

*<sup>34</sup> “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.*

Worry is part of our lives. We worry about how to pay our bills, where to go to college, whom we are to marry, where we are to live and what job we are to work. There are many things in life that we worry about and Jesus addresses how to overcome worry. The solution is to trust Him.

Jesus gives us two examples from nature as to why we should not worry.

The first example from nature is found in *Matthew 6:26*, ***“Look to the birds. They don’t plan or harvest or store food in barns, for your Heavenly Father feeds them.”***

Birds-what an interesting example for us. Optics Magazine reports that researchers from Princeton University estimate that there are about 9,700 species of birds around the world. Here in Ecuador, according to the Cero Ecuador official checklist, there are 1722 species of birds here in Ecuador. Of those, 1673 confirmed and 49 undocumented.

Of the number of birds here in Ecuador, two are most prominent here in the highlands. One is the Andes Condor and the other is the hummingbird. According to Latin Roots Travel, there are over 132 species of hummingbirds here in Ecuador, more than any other country in the world.

The Bible says that God is the one who feeds the birds. God provides food for each one. Hummingbirds eat nectar from flowers, insects, ants, mosquitos, & gnats. Condors eat carrion, such as the remains of deer, cow, or sheep. They will also eat small animals when they can find them. God provides for them. Yet, God tells us that we are more valuable than the birds and that He will provide for our needs.

The second example from nature are lilies. According to one florist website, there are over 100 species of lilies of which the Asiatic lily is the most common lily in the world. Another floral website says that lilies have different meanings

throughout different cultures, but generally, these amazing blooms represent grace, royalty, beauty, and rebirth.

***<sup>28</sup> “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing,<sup>29</sup> yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. <sup>30</sup> And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?***

Now back to our passage in Philippians 4

***<sup>6</sup> Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.***

After telling us not to worry and to pray about everything, Paul then goes on to tell us how we should pray.

First, Paul encourages us to tell God what we need. One prayer could be like this: “Lord, I’m without a job, could you please provide work for me. The Bible says that if a person doesn’t work, he shouldn’t eat. Lord, I love to eat so I really need a job. You know Lord, a plate of hornada sounds pretty good right now with some maduros as dessert. And then there is ceviche, and all kinds of things I love to eat. So Lord, I humbly ask you to open up an opportunity to work so that I can honor you that way.” ☺

You get the idea, right? Pray about the need for employment. Pray about making new friends. Pray about who you should marry. Pray about what college or university you should attend. Pray about your health needs. Pray about your financial needs. Pray about your lost loved one that need Jesus. Pray about every detail of your life. It is helpful to buy a notebook. Write down each prayer request and need with the date that you asked God to meet that need. And when God answers that prayer, whether yes or no, write down the date as a praise to Him. Each day write down something. That way it is before you as you pray to God.

God will always answer the prayers of His children. The answer will always be yes or no. If it is yes, it may include the answer of wait. It may be that you are not ready to receive the answer to that prayer. God may need to allow you to go through a process so that you grow and mature in your faith before He answers that prayer. But God always answers our prayer. He may say no. That answer is always hard for us, but it is His answer to us and for our good.

Second, Paul encourages that while we are praying and telling God what we need, he also tells us to be thankful for all He has done for us. Vance Havner, a preacher, and Bible teacher who lived many years ago said this: “If redemption is the only thing that God provides for us, the He had done far more than we desire.” But we know that God has done so much more for us. Again, take a notebook and write out all the things that God has done for you. When you do that, it will probably be multiple pages of things that God has done.

When we pray and when we give thanks for all God has done, the result is something supernatural. We think that God may give us the answer to our prayers like a genie in a bottle, but, God gives us so much more. Besides taking into consideration our requests and gratitude, the Bible tells us that He gives something that only He can give.

***<sup>6</sup> Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. <sup>7</sup> Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.***

There is something that happens when we pray and give things. The result is peace. Peace is also a fruit of the Spirit of God. Peace comes during the exact moments of our lives when we need it the most. It will come when we share with God the details of our lives, the needs of our lives. Peace comes when we humbly give thanks for the salvation we have in Jesus Christ and all that He has done throughout our lives.

When we cry out to God in our hurt, He gives us peace. When we complain to God in our frustrations, He gives us peace. When we are most needy, He gives us something that only He can give. Peace. And whatever answer he gives from our prayers, whether yes or no or wait, He will give us peace as go on in the daily aspects of our lives.

Let's pray.