

There are two movies in my lifetime that I have shed a few tears over. The first was an early 2000s Classic featuring Mandy Moore called *A Walk to Remember*. The second film was about a year ago—Pixar's *Inside Out 2*. Not only was it a box office success, but it became a cultural phenomenon that spoke directly into our culturally anxious moment.

For so many of you, this film felt like equal parts cathartic and devastating. It was giving a visual representation of what so many of us have experienced going on in the deepest parts of our lives. These films, *Inside Out 1 and 2*, take place in the mind and person of the protagonist Riley, who, by the time of the second film, is now a pubescent teenager navigating the world of an ever-expanding palette of emotions.

The film follows her by depicting these different emotions through quippy characters. There's the fiery red character of Anger. There's the blue drab character of Sadness, and of course, the ever-cheery, optimistic, brightly colored yellow Joy. The audiences were moved by this because it depicted what, in theory, is going on in our minds, but they are really the core of our being.

Inside Out 2 presented a litany of new characters, but the one that grabbed our hearts was the character of Anxiety, who shows up with a little bit of baggage. This little orange character shows up on the screen, and it tapped into this deep part of the human experience that seems to be so embedded in our world, and my guess is many of your experiences of life as well.

The entire film is centered on a power struggle. As Riley navigates those pubescent years, a power struggle between Joy and Anxiety wage inside of her. Inside the mind of Riley is a control panel, and that's where it all takes place. Joy is trying as hard as she can, no matter the circumstances, to project joy into Riley's life, but often Anxiety seizes control of the scenario, just trying to help.

Slowly, it begins to destroy the entire control center inside Riley. Joy is desperately trying to keep Anxiety at bay, and so is trying to brainstorm and think through how to maintain and get Anxiety out of there. Joy says, "I'll just tell Anxiety not to worry so much anymore, and then she'll say, 'Wow, Joy, I didn't think of that. Thank you.'"

Does Jesus' teaching this morning not seem a little bit like that? All of a sudden, in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, we run into this teaching where Jesus says, "Therefore, do not worry." If you've ever dealt with worry and anxiety, you probably sound a little bit like Joy. You're like, "Oh, thank you, Jesus. I never thought of that. What if I just chose not to worry?"

The reality is that the statistics demonstrate that so many of us live with an anxious heart and mind. In 2002, a report by the American

Psychological Association detailed that around 7 in 10 adults, or 72 percent, have experienced additional health impacts due to stress, including feeling overwhelmed and experiencing challenges in sleeping habits and worrying constantly. Almost one out of every three adults is habitually anxious. Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist, calls this the anxious age or the anxious generation.

What if there's something beneath the surface here of Jesus' teachings? What if his teaching, which seems so obtuse at times, isn't dismissive of our struggles, but what if Jesus actually has something to say to our struggle with worry and anxiety?

Jesus, throughout the Sermon on the Mount, has been drilling down to the most core parts of what it means to be human—anger, desire, money, relationships, and now even worry. Jesus understands what it means to be human. Like we've said in the past, you will be tempted in this particular teaching to get out ahead of Jesus and say, "Jesus, you have no idea what it means to be a human in 2025. There's no way that you could offer any hope for an anxious heart." But could we just come before Jesus one more time, dissect this concept of anxiety and worry? Lay it before Jesus and test out if he has something for you and me.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25). Let's break this down a little bit. Jesus opens by saying not to worry. Worry, in Greek, is the word *merimnaó*, which is translated as worry, anxiety, or concern. It has a broad semantic range. One dictionary describes this word as properly, drawn in opposite directions; "divided into parts." Figuratively, "to go to pieces" by being pulled apart (in different directions). Literally, to be divided or distracted. I like that definition of anxiety.

Because if you've experienced that at whatever level you have, that idea of being pulled apart feels accurate. It's a nuanced understanding that says it divides our focus. It demands our attention and forces us to be thoroughly preoccupied with things that typically shouldn't be at the forefront of our minds. Hold that idea of divided attention, of you being caught thinking of something that isn't yet to be, something out in the future that isn't a current reality, but yet is there and happening.

Now, when Jesus says, do not worry, it's important for us to remember what he's talked about in previous texts, particularly the one on anger. When Jesus said not to be angry, we unpacked that and realized there are a couple of different forms of anger. The first is the kind that floods through our body in which something obstructs our will, and we're flooded with anger. Then we have the choice on how to deal with that and release the anger. That is what Jesus is inviting us into. But the sin

that Jesus was naming then was when anger becomes the residing baseline emotion of our heart. It's that nursing of a grudge.

This, "Do not worry," is a similar rationale or logic. He's not saying it's a sin to feel worry and anxiety. That's a part of being human. That's what *Inside Out 2* beautifully depicted. It's a part of life. Rather, there's freedom and liberation, where we don't have to be in that resting state of anxiety. As one writer puts it, "To feel worry and anxiety are normal parts of being human. However, feeding worry and anxiety leads to bondage." So Jesus says to not worry. But then he names a few different parts of the object of our worry. He begins by saying, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear."

Two words, the first, your life, *psuché* = life, mind, soul, inner being. You can tell even by those words that define, *psuche* that it's actually a pretty difficult word to translate into English. But Jesus is intentionally using that because he contrasts it with this other word body. Do not worry about your body. This is the Greek word, *sóma* = body. It just literally means your body. So he says not to worry about your life, which in some ways we can think of as the inner being. And he says not to worry about your body, which in some ways we could think of as the outer being.

Jesus is using a method that uses two contrasting terms to speak of everything in between them. It's as if Jesus is saying, "Do not worry about your inner life or your outer life, or anything in between. Do not worry about the whole of your existence: He is trying to show us that we are living in the reality of the kingdom of God. Remember, that is the thesis statement, in Matthew 4, that sets up the whole of The Sermon on the Mount—the kingdom of God is here. That means we reorient everything about our life from our *psuche* to our *soma*.

Let's look briefly Jesus' tightly constructed argument, and then we will dissect anxiety and see that there is hope with what Jesus is offering. I just read the general heading of the section of Jesus' teaching. "Do not worry about your life or about your body." He then goes into those two segments, "Your life," which we could talk about the sustenance. That's why he says. "Do not worry about your life, what you'll eat, what you'll drink."

Then he gives this very quippy statement, which scholars would call a lesser-to-greater rationale. "*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?*" (v. 26). A lesser to a greater. He then offers a reproof against anxiety. "*Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*" (v. 27).

He moves to the second topic, "your body," and he says, "Do not worry about what you will wear." He then offers this lesser-to-greater rationale. "*And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.*" (vv. 28-29). Solomon was the richest man to have ever lived. He says the flowers are more beautiful than anything the richest man could ever do. Does he not care much more about you? Then his reproof.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Matthew 6:30-32

That's the outline. I want you to see that Jesus is being very intentional about where he's going with this. So look back down in verse 26.

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" vv. 26-27

Jesus' advice is to look at the birds. Now this seems a bit aloof. At first, you're thinking that anxiety is pouring down on me. I'm struggling with understanding how I'm going to make it through whatever the circumstances, and Jesus says to look at the birds.

For the past few weeks, I've been starting to walk a little bit more in the mornings. Frankly, the past few months in ministry have been a bit tough. I've been through a season that seems like it's a little bit harder sometimes. In those moments, I had three weeks off from preaching. This is the text I got to sit in for three weeks, which I can't help but think was the providence of God. So, I thought I would take Jesus literally.

For the past few weeks, I've been going on a long morning walk in which I sit with God and allow all the anxieties that are running through my head to bubble to the surface. What I continually find on that little walk is birds flying everywhere. I was thinking, "Lord, you must just be like having a good time up there." But what has been fascinating about this is that slowly, as I take those little steps and watch the birds, I have realized so much of what Jesus was saying doesn't need to be unpacked in the Greek.

Look at the birds. They're scurrying about. I don't know where they live. They have food. Their life is a life in which they seek out their daily bread. These birds flurry about; they could be quite anxious. They don't know where their next meal is coming from, and they don't have a 401(k), and yet God cares about them. How much more does God care about us than the birds? Do not worry, but look at the birds. Then he goes on and starts talking about this concept of clothing.

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? vv. 28-30

Jesus then says to step back and look amongst the flowers of the field, which, on my walk, there is an abundance of. There's an abundance of growth as I walk. It's almost as if walking on this trail was slowing me down enough to realize it's a path that I've driven by countless times

at 60 to 75 miles an hour. I've driven by it, but I had never seen the abundance of life. Jesus is preaching to me to look at the flowers. They don't toil or spin. Those flowers are going to get mowed over, cut down, and tossed out. They're temporary. Does God not care for you more as someone created in the very image of God who will last into eternity? Does God not care about you more than these flowers? Jesus then summarizes.

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. vv. 31-32

So much of our worry is rooted in this concept of trust. I hesitate to go there because I don't want you to think that if I experience anxiety, that means I should be ashamed. It's not what Jesus is speaking of. In fact, that little line where he says that you have little faith, I've always interpreted that as, how could you have so little faith? What's fascinating is that scholars say the phrase, unique to Matthew, is much more akin to a nickname. It's more like "Little Faith." It's what Jesus says to Peter when he is walking on the water. He says, "You Little Faith."

He's not upset. He is not angry. Because if Peter had little faith, I mean, Peter jumped out on the water and began to walk towards Jesus. It's much more like Jesus says, "Listen, I know it's going to be trouble. I know anxiety will come, but you're like my Little Faith." It's like when I look at my daughters and say You're my little girl, you're that Little Faith, you'll grow in that, but you're Little Faith.

Jesus is trying to offer us a different picture, a reality in which we no longer have to live constrained by anxiety because we come to see the world through a different lens that recognizes, like the psalmist says, that surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23).

So much about following Jesus and living in the reality of the kingdom of God is that our hearts have been discipled into the parity, which is this present age that's passing away. So all of these anxieties and pressures are very real. You experience the hurt and pain of them, but they are not the ultimate truth of reality. There is coming a day in which all things are made new, and Jesus is inviting us to live in the overlap. It will hurt, and there will be anxiety. He is not dismissive of that, but he's trying to give us a different perspective to see out over the horizon at what Jesus is offering to us.

So, what then do we do with anxiety? How do we come to not be anxious? To answer this question, I want to call up someone with much more skill than I and more expertise in this. My wife is much more qualified to talk on these topics than I am. So, this is Lindsay, or I should properly say Dr. Lindsay Sneed. She is a licensed clinical psychologist as well as a doctoral-level behavior analyst. She has a PhD in clinical psychology, two master's degrees in applied psychology and educational counseling.

She's worked in the field of psychology with a focus on behavioral and cognitive behavioral therapy for neurotypical and neurodiverse

individuals for nearly two decades. Bottom line, she's incredibly smart. She is also a faithful, compassionate follower of Jesus. I want her to unpack anxiety at a clinical level because it will help us understand what's going on in our brains, and then see how Jesus' teaching has something to offer us. So I'll hand it over to her.

Dr. Lindsey Sneed

So I grew up and always felt very safe in a very rural and beautiful area of Northern California. But I was 16 years old and home alone, and I cannot tell you specifically what was going on. But I was in my room and all of a sudden, a huge weight of dread overcame my system. I was scared of something inside of me, but I couldn't tell you what it was. I needed to run away, but there was nothing to run away to. I started crying and shaking, and I thought I was going to pass out because I started seeing black stars out of the corner of my eye. My fear had overtaken my nervous system. I did not know what to do, so I ran to our phone to call my dad. Just as I picked up the phone, my dad walked in the door, and I ran into his arms, bawling. This was my first panic attack.

Amongst the USA general population, 50 percent of individuals have had at least one panic attack over the course of their lifetime. Anxiety is a normal part of being human. God ingrained this very important process into our design. It's called our sympathetic nervous system. It's our body and brain's way of telling us that something might be wrong. It helps us survive. Anxiety activates this part of our nervous system. It makes our hearts beat faster. It sharpens our attention. It gets us ready to act, which is really great when you're on a hike and you see a snake coming towards you. Your body is quick to respond.

But what happens when our sympathetic nervous system is activated and we're ready to act, but there's nothing obviously dangerous around us? We have nothing to act on, and we're left with a heightened alert system. Then we begin to dwell, because of that sharpened focus, on whatever alerted us or we think alerted us to the danger in the first place.

Obvious nervous system activating events like a car pulling out in front of us unexpectedly, an animal approaching us, someone or something following us, are obvious examples of perceived or actual threat. Our nervous system is trying to warn us that there is something wrong. You need to be on guard. You need to respond. We have that increased heart rate, sharpened focus, and readiness to act.

With our world being ever-connected, there are significantly more opportunities for perceived threats. News headlines, social media, email, calendar reminders, performance reviews, relationship difficulties, and parenting pressures, all of it. Our nervous system doesn't know the difference between a true emergency and a string of notifications.

On August 24th, 2014, at 3:00 am, our family was jolted awake by a 6.0 earthquake in Napa, California. We lived just a few miles away from the epicenter, and our sympathetic nervous system was in prime action. Everyone in our house had racing heartbeats. Kevin's family was with us too, so we had five children in our house and four adults. All of our senses were acute. Kevin and I protected Madison with our bodies.

Once everything calmed down, everyone in our house went out into the street to check on our neighbors and make sure that they were okay, too.

We can all agree that anxiety in this situation is very acute and expected. Fast forward two weeks, and Kevin and I were staying in a hotel in San Francisco for our anniversary. He got a room on the highest floor that he could to get a great view. We could see everything in the city, which we love. But this wasn't so great, actually. We felt every movement of the hotel, as it shifted in the wind, our bodies were activated because we had just gone through a natural disaster, and our nervous system didn't know the difference between the actual threat of an earthquake and the normal movement of the building. Our anxiety was high, our senses were acute, and we did not sleep. We drank a lot of coffee that weekend.

This same concept carries over to our daily experiences—the news, difficult relationships, and even good relationships, the email pings, the team messages you may have. One bad experience on any one of these fronts, and now your nervous system is on constant alert to keep you safe. It could also be that you are a perfectionist like me. You think that by not responding or not doing something as fast as it's supposed to be done, you're a bad person, a bad employee, or a bad friend. So to protect yourself, you're always on alert. We are living in this constant low hum of tension as if there's danger around every corner.

So what exactly is anxiety? There are a few different types of anxiety I want to outline. Not all anxiety is clinical anxiety, meaning that it's diagnosable. In fact, many of us live in a state of subclinical anxiety. Some forms of anxiety may rise to clinical thresholds. So the first one is a panic attack, or panic disorder. That's what I have experienced. It's a sudden surge or overwhelming fear that feels very physical. It's a racing heart, shortness of breath, dizziness, maybe even passing out.

Then we have generalized anxiety, which is more of a chronic state of anxiety, feeling worried most of the time about a lot of things, even about things that you wouldn't think are worth worrying about—work, relationships, safety, and the future. Then we have social anxiety. This is an intense fear or worry about how we're being perceived, and this often leads us to avoid social situations. Each of these not only affects our mind, but also our bodies, our ability to sleep well, our appetites, our energy, and our ability to be present with our brothers and sisters.

Of course, though, God ingrained in our perfect design a counter to the sympathetic nervous system. God designed in our bodies something like a calm button. It's called the parasympathetic nervous system. When this part of our body is active, it's like our soul is being told it's okay. We are safe and can rest now.

It slows our heart rate and lowers our blood pressure, helping our body feel more at peace. It helps our stomachs digest food, which only happens when we are not in danger. It produces saliva, which may be unexpected, but our mouth isn't dry when we are calm, and it even shrinks our pupils, because we don't need to be on high alert anymore. Most

of all, it takes over when we're resting, praying, breathing deeply, and feeling safe, not when we are anxious or stressed.

So this parasympathetic/sympathetic system that God created reminds me of the story of Elijah. After that dramatic spiritual victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah runs for his life. Queen Jezebel has just threatened to kill him, and Elijah is terrified—a truly nervous system-activating event. He flees into the wilderness and sits down under a broom tree. He says, "I have had enough; Lord, take my life." His sympathetic system is highly activated. Elijah cannot think straight. He is scared, and I can imagine he was probably experiencing something like a panic attack.

Instead of rebuking Elijah, God sends an angel, who gently wakes him and tells him to get up and eat. There is a freshly baked bread and a jar of water waiting for him. Elijah eats and drinks and goes back to sleep. A second time, the angel returns and tells him to get up and eat. "For the journey is too much for you." God doesn't scold Elijah's fear or exhaustion. He's caring for Elijah's body first with food, water, and rest. God is activating his parasympathetic nervous system.

God invites Elijah to the quiet, holy encounter, not in a fire or earthquake, but in a gentle whisper. In this passage, Jesus is telling us not to worry. Like God did with Elijah, he isn't dismissing our need. He's reminding us that we are seen, valuable, and our father knows what we need. God invited Elijah to rest and restore his soul, and by doing so, this allowed Elijah to slow down and gain the proper perspective of reality. His parasympathetic nervous system took over.

In this Matthew 6 passage, Jesus is inviting us into this same system. He's inviting us to meditate on the birds and the flowers in a similar way. This allows us to pause and reflect, and gives us perspective on reality to see beyond our response of anxiety.

As I've detailed the sympathetic nervous system, the response of anxiety is a normal human response. But where distortion occurs within anxiety is what the author and psychiatrist Ellen Vora calls false anxiety. This is when our nervous system is activated, and our body reacts to all those heightened senses. We begin to hyperfocus on the activating event, believing that we're in danger. We have to run from the danger, protect ourselves, fight, flee, or freeze something to complete the anxiety cycle. What we do instead is hyper-fixate on it instead of allowing the parasympathetic nervous system to take over.

You may have had an experience of your boss sending you a message about a meeting. Then suddenly that dread overwhelms you, "Oh my gosh, why does my boss want to meet with me? They must be firing me." So we're perseverating on these ideas, and our anxiety is being fed. The perceived threat is that I'm going to lose my job. Your nervous system is on full alert, and it wants to protect you from these dangers. Your sympathetic nervous system is on overdrive.

What God is inviting us into is to take a moment to rest. Consider the flowers in the field, and the birds of the air. They do not toil nor spin yet your heavenly father cares for them. How much more does he care for you? We don't have to live in this anxiety. When we pause and rest, we

are allowing God's natural system of restoration, the parasympathetic nervous system, to take over.

Kevin Sneed

I love that line from the story of Elijah that she referenced, where God looks at Elijah and says, essentially, "Take a seat. The journey is too hard for you." As I hear that phrase, many of us feel that God has instilled in us the system to help us when our lives are in danger, but often it consumes our minds, and it overtakes us.

Toward the end of *Inside Out 2*, Riley, this little, pubescent teenager, goes through a panic attack, and Anxiety is running around in the control room out of control. There's this moment in which Joy is trying to navigate this. Anxiety says, "I'm just trying to help. I'm just trying to help." Anxiety and worry are God's good gifts to us, trying to help in moments where they're needed. But in a fallen, broken world devastated by sin, we often get caught in this now broken system.

As Lindsay detailed, we've been given a calm button, this parasympathetic nervous system. On my walks through this season, as I look at the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, in prayer, I'm walking with a God who will not abandon me. Slowly, my parasympathetic nervous system is taking over, and I'm breathing more deeply. It is giving me the perspective that I am, in fact, safe and okay.

We still haven't necessarily answered the question of how to live into that reality. Because anxieties will come and go. This isn't the one-shot answer. Some of it's in that clinically diagnosable anxiety, that will take a lot of support around you, maybe even including a medical and mental health professional. None of us are meant to walk this path alone. Jesus gives us help in this as well.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matthew 6:33-34

I love that last line because that tells me that Jesus isn't dismissive of the worries of today. He says not to worry about tomorrow because there's a lot to deal with today. But then his instruction on how we come out of this, again, is to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

Biblical commentator Jonathan Pennington wrote, "The solution is to set one's heart and mind to seeking God's way of being in the world in his coming reign, which promises to result in all of one's needs being truly met." Remember, the exact context is wondering how I am going to eat. How am I going to drink, and what am I going to wear? And coming out of the teaching on money. So Jesus is using that particular context, which can be quite anxiety-inducing, and writing a broader perspective on how we navigate this broken world.

Pennington goes on. "Thus, the solution to anxiety is not a simplistic stop worrying, but a redirecting of the disciple's vision to the proper heart orientation, accompanied by a promise of provision." I can't think of any other way to describe what Pennington just said and what Jesus is inviting us into than through prayer.

Think about Paul in Philippians 4. I believe Paul is riffing off this teaching of Jesus. *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near"* (Phil. 4:4-5). Notice the perspective shift—rejoice. Always remember, you're living in the reality of the kingdom of God here and now. Therefore, rejoice, even if it seems foolish, even when you're experiencing the brokenness of this world. Rejoice. I love the affirmation of God's presence because it's never been that God has promised to remove you from circumstances, but here Paul says that the Lord is near. Then the command.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil:4:6-7

Notice that it doesn't say that the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will remove all the pain in your life. Notice that it doesn't say it will solve all the problems that you have. Rather, the promise is that the peace of God, which transcends our understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds. It will protect us from that overlap of the world that's passing away, that temporary world that brings all sorts of pain, hurt, and brokenness. All of that is passing away, but the peace of God will transcend all of it, even our very understanding, guarding our hearts and minds.

Prayer is Communion

One of the ways that we go about this is through prayer. In prayer, we're fundamentally communing with God. Prayer is communion with God, but not just any God; it is the God of peace. Think about the way the scriptures talk about the triune God, the Father, Son, and Spirit. Romans 15, calls the Father the God of peace. In Isaiah 9, Jesus, the Son, is called the Prince of Peace. In Ephesians 4, the Spirit is called the Spirit of peace.

See, the triune God, the very trinity, that three-in-one conception is, at its core, peace. It's pervaded by peace. So when we pray, we are communing with the God of peace. As we say, often around here, what you meditate on is like what you will become; where you direct your mind, where you direct your focus, will slowly integrate itself into your life.

So, let's bring it back to what Lindsay was talking about. If you're caught in this broken cycle of the sympathetic nervous system spinning out of control, and you are meditating on that which may or may not be true—something in the future, a worry and anxiety—in prayer, we come back and fixate on the God of peace. Slowly over time, as we fixate on God, that peace becomes absorbed into our being.

This is why I'm so passionate about silent prayer every morning. Every morning that I do it, I sit for 10 minutes in the quiet. It's one of the first things I do before I touch my phone, before I touch my iPad, before I turn on a computer, I sit in my green chair at home, and sit with my hands open. I don't say anything. I just commune with God and allow the God of peace to be present and attentive to me. I fight with everything in me to be attentive to him, because what happens in that moment is what you all assume. Every thought you've ever had floods

through the surface. You look down, and you're two minutes in and have eight more to go.

That's your mind doing what it's been trained to do, but it doesn't have to be that way. It's not the law of gravity. Over time, your mind can allow all of those thoughts to come to the surface, and in silent prayer, you hold those before God, saying, "God, I can't do this. The journey's too hard for me. Could you take this? Could we walk with this together?" Prayer is communing with the God of peace.

Prayer is Contemplation

One way to describe anxiety is distorted contemplation. It's looking at the thing that may or may not be true, but is, in fact, in your life and causing a reaction within you. It is contemplation on the brokenness of the world. However, prayer is to contemplate the goodness, beauty, and love of God. God is the God of peace. He is the God who is love. So slowly in prayer, we begin to allow that image of God to be who we are sitting before.

So for me, in that time of prayer, I often, just this morning, envisioned God sitting next to me, just being there present. Usually, on Sunday mornings, I've got some anxiety and stress about preaching and standing before you all, even though you're lovely. I sit there and say, "Lord, could you just love me in this?" And the Lord just loves me because that's what he is, he's love.

About once a month, I see a spiritual director. It's just a fancy way of saying someone who just listens to the Spirit with me in conversation. So I drive down to Menlo Park and meet with my spiritual director, Patty. I got to do that this week. Patty is this older, lovely woman who's filled with wisdom and offers this outpouring of wisdom to me. But often, when I walk out of that office, what I remember is sitting with her as a non-anxious presence. It's her, me, and God, and we're just trying to be attentive to what the Spirit may be doing in my life. Just sitting in the presence of a non-anxious person like Patty does something to my soul.

That is a fraction of the peace that God has to offer. Prayer is contemplation in which we come before God and allow our minds to rest on the beauty and the love of God, and slowly, over time, it begins to shape us.

Prayer is Relinquishing Control

Prayer is relinquishing the illusion of control. The reality is that you have little control over your life. We believe we have way more control than we do. You cannot control the economy. You cannot control your kids. You cannot control your health. Often, you cannot control so many things, but anxiety is often rooted in trying to grasp control. And in that, we have to learn to trust God, yielding to his rule and his reign.

This is why we present our request to God. That's what Paul says in Philippians 4 to not be anxious about anything, but in everything, present your request. Say, "Lord, this is what I'm walking through. This

is what I desire. God, I long for this to be true." Think about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will, but yours be done." Think about Mary. "May it be to me, according to your word." So much of the spiritual life we must come to see is sitting and learning to yield to the presence of God and allow God to slowly reshape our inner being into a person of love, because that's who God is.

Therefore, do not worry about your life, what you'll eat, or what you'll drink. Do not worry about your clothes and what you'll wear. Doesn't the Father love you more than the birds and the flowers? It's the invitation for all of us. T

here's a way forward where we don't have to live constrained by anxiety.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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