

MARCH 25, 2018

40 DAYS OF FAITH

ANXIETY-FREE LIFE



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Easter is almost here and we're excited for the upcoming celebration! We're also excited that our friend Dave Schmelzer, Executive Director of [Blue Ocean Faith](#) is leading us through our final Daily Guide for this year's 40 Days of Faith. Here's Dave . . .

Monday, March 26

This week we'll focus on Jesus' powerful teaching about how to live an anxiety-free life. Anxiety, it turns out, is a central human problem! Beyond looking at some Bible teachings on this key subject, we'll engage in a powerful spiritual practice to get God's direct help.

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ Jesus said, "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?" 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? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ 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? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Points of interest:

- Evidently our financial health depends more on God’s blessing than it does on our earning power.
 - Throughout this passage, Jesus exhorts us to see the world differently than we’re prone to. Very few of us are so secure financially that we lose all of our anxiety about provision. In those moments of financial anxiety, we’re prone to let our minds race as we look to feel confident that everything will be okay forever.
 - So what is Jesus’ alternative? It’s to take the energy we expend in our temptation towards anxiety and turn that energy towards God instead. He’s eager to comfort us if we’ll believe his promises!
- In verse 27 Jesus encourages us to remind ourselves that worrying, beyond ruining our day, doesn’t actually accomplish anything.
 - The USA Today is famous for brightly-colored infographics. Here’s one that caught my eye: Looking back over life, what adults say they most regret wasting time on.

67%: worrying.
32%: watching TV (this survey was pre web-surfing or video games).
Others receiving votes: commuting and cleaning/doing chores.
 - It’s striking that two-thirds of their respondents—two-thirds!—highlighted how pointless their worrying was, in retrospect.
 - On this note, here’s a gem from the French philosopher Montaigne: “My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened.”
- Jesus offers us this powerful tip: Remember to rejoice in what God has given you right now—and to prohibit yourself from worrying about what might go wrong later on.
 - V. 34: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”
 - There’s a delightful cynicism in that last sentence! But many of us, taking Jesus at his word, do find real help in reflecting that—as of right now!—our needs do seem to be met. Maybe we can take comfort in that? And then consider that perhaps Jesus will continue to be good to us tomorrow?

Taking it home:

The book of Psalms in the Old Testament is a collection prayers & songs that have been guiding and inspiring people of faith for more than 3,000 years! The time-honored practice of praying the Psalms as if they were our own prayers can bring peace and confidence. These prayers give us real spiritual backing as we look to trust God rather than worry. (A wonderful pamphlet on why this has been so powerful is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's [Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible](#). He writes: "Where the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian church. With its recovery will come unsuspected power.") So, in that spirit, let's start off this week by praying the most famous Psalm. While we do it, if just for that moment, let's be full of faith in each line we pray.

Psalm 23 - A psalm of David.

¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk

through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil,

for you are with me; your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me

all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord

forever.

Tuesday, March 27

Today we'll think about how the great author of two-thirds of the New Testament, Paul, teaches spirituality. (A hint: His approach to overcoming anxiety is right at the heart of his whole message.)

Philippians 4:4-7

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

Points of interest

- Here's an observation on this passage from Gordon Fee, the great Pentecostal scholar: **"Joy, prayer, thanksgiving, peace—these identify Pauline spirituality."**
 - Think about that! The spirituality that Paul most teaches is all about joy, prayer, thanksgiving and peace. It's not "being a moral person" or "obeying God's laws" or "having the right opinions about spiritual, moral or political issues." Those of course might be very good things but, according to Paul, if we're actually experiencing Jesus, the most essential thing we'll find is a quality of life which we all really crave. We really do follow a God who loves us!
- The road to this good quality of life comes as we obey a particular command from God: to always rejoice in the Lord. This command is so important to Paul that he repeats it to make sure we don't miss it. "I will say it again: Rejoice!" He's serious about this!
- It's worth noting Paul's own circumstances as he issues this clarion call: he's in a Roman prison where he expects to die. (Scholars believe it's possible that he did die during this imprisonment.) Other prisoners are mocking his faith. He's dependent on food and other provisions being brought to him by his friends—those things aren't provided by the Romans—and those provisions have been a little spotty.
 - And yet this letter, as much as any other book of the Bible, is regarded as a song of joy and praise. How is that possible?
 - Just a few verses later, he tells us why he's so excited about the things he's teaching here in the midst of his own dire circumstances.

This is v.12 of this same chapter: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every

situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”

- Wow! What’s the “secret” he’s found that has unlocked such a crucial key in his life? It’s this—rejoicing in God no matter what.
- Paul’s solution to anxiety here is...just not to be anxious! V. 6: “Do not be anxious about anything.” On the surface that’s not very helpful—sometimes we just are anxious! That’s the human condition!
 - But he gives us help to keep this command. As we rejoice in God in all circumstances, we can also take all our needs and requests to God. And we can thank him as we do.

This is Paul’s mechanism—what Gordon Fee calls his spirituality—to getting a continuing experience of God’s peace that replaces our anxiety.

Taking it home

Again, let’s take advantage of the Psalms in our quest to become the person Paul describes. The spirituality of the Psalms is entirely aligned with Paul on this. As they describe intense life circumstances and challenges towards despair that are deeper than we’ll likely experience, they circle again and again to commands to our own souls to praise God—as if this is the heart of the matter. As the Psalter comes to a close, this becomes a crescendo, climaxing with the last seven Psalms, which punch this command with ever-increasing intensity. Today let’s pray the third-to-last Psalm. Pray it a few times. Pray it aloud if you can. Improvise off of it as prayers come to mind. Pray it for yourself, for your friends, for your church.

Psalm 148

¹ Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord from the heavens;

praise him in the heights above.

² Praise him, all his angels;

praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

³ Praise him, sun and moon;

praise him, all you shining stars.

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens

and you waters above the skies.

⁵ Let them praise the name of the Lord,

*for at his command they were created,
6 and he established them for ever and ever—
he issued a decree that will never pass away.*

*7 Praise the Lord from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
8 lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,
9 you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,
10 wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,
11 kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth,
12 young men and women,
old men and children.*

*13 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.
14 And he has raised up for his people a horn,
15 the praise of all his faithful servants,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.
Praise the Lord.*

Wednesday, March 28

Let's look at one more word on the subject of an anxiety-free life. This one is also from the Apostle Paul and comes from his epistle to the church in Rome.

Romans 8:26-39

We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Points of interest

- In Philippians, Paul gives us a strong encouragement to do the most important thing for our spiritual health—rejoice in God always. But here Paul steps back and explains what’s happening behind the curtain as we do this.
- Evidently the meaning of our life isn’t obvious stuff like growing in career advancement or seeing our kids do well or finally achieving financial security. Those might be great things! But only one thing will satisfy our craving for meaning and—while maybe we should have seen it coming in a book like the Bible—it still hits us as a surprise.
 - The way we’ll experience meaning is by personally becoming more and more like Jesus.
 - Clearly Jesus didn’t find meaning by dodging suffering. Something else was at work in his life that Paul wants us to tap into as well. We’ll become like Jesus by way of a few things.
 - It will happen, per Philippians, as we rejoice in God as a top priority of our day.
 - It will also happen as, day by day, we experience the Holy Spirit in our lives more and more. Then the Holy Spirit will pray for and through us in ways we can’t entirely understand.
- In this process of becoming like Jesus, we’re helped by a fresh and powerful understanding of a few key truths.
 - First, we can be confident that God is working everything that happens in our lives for our ultimate good in our great endeavor of becoming like Jesus.
 - But how is that possible?! Paul has just said that suffering is a central backdrop to all life! If we lose a job or experience a lasting health crisis or see a loved one suffer...how is “becoming like Jesus” anything more than a sentimental compensation for our real loss?
 - Apparently it’s because God promises to use all of his resources as God to make us “more than conquerors” in these things. Here’s my understanding of what that means:
 - The devil wants some setback to discourage us in our life and our connection with God.
 - “Conquering” that would mean that the devil’s plans there don’t actually harm us.

- But being “more than a conqueror” over that thing means that what the devil meant to harm us actually—who knew?—becomes a key way that God will bless us, will give us some good thing we wouldn’t have had otherwise.
 - Our ultimate happiness does not depend on us being spiritual geniuses. God assumes we’ll be the flawed, limited people that we are.
 - But if we rejoice in God and look to the Holy Spirit, we can be confident that our stumbling blocks will become stepping stones. If we live in this way, Paul says we actually have nothing to fear.
- As a final encouragement, Paul tells you that, right now, Jesus is in heaven praying for you.

Taking it home

Let’s pray right now! You’ve picked up that I’m a big believer in praying the Psalms each day. My mentor in this, St. Patrick, prayed ONE HUNDRED Psalms each day—50 in the morning and 50 at night. (more on this soon) He believed that we shouldn’t pick and choose—we need to pray them all so that God could shape our souls by way of all the richness and warfare of the entire Psalter. All those Psalms about battle and about kicking in the teeth of our enemies? Perhaps our enemies are not people but are demons who are trying to discourage us—just as Paul says in Romans 8 that the devil is trying to do. I have no problem wanting to see their teeth kicked in! My favorite is Psalm 16.

Psalm 16

¹ Keep me safe, my God,

for in you I take refuge.

² I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord;

apart from you I have no good thing.”

³ I say of the holy people who are in the land,

“They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.”

⁴ Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.

I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods

or take up their names on my lips.

⁵ Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;

you make my lot secure.

⁶ *The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.*

⁷ *I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.*

⁸ *I keep my eyes always on the Lord.
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

⁹ *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,*

¹⁰ *because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.*

¹¹ *You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Thursday, March 29

We get a surprise as we scan the whole Bible on this question of living an anxiety-free life. As Jesus and Paul both teach us, overcoming anxiety turns out to be a surprising window into all of spirituality. And it encompasses most major Bible themes. One of those themes, as the Psalms teaches so insistently is warfare. Suddenly we have insight as to why warfare is such a major Old Testament theme. Until this insight, we mostly have questions. Isn't Jesus's message one of peace? Why is the early Bible so full of bloodshed? Fascinating books have been written on this question. (One that will unsettle you in delightful ways about these passages is Peter Enns's [The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It.](#)) A central biblical perspective on overcoming anxiety comes right at the start of what's called the conquest of Canaan, in the book of Joshua from the Old Testament.

Joshua 1:1-9

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

⁷ "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Points of interest

- Joshua is a surprisingly important figure in the Bible. On the one hand, Moses is the big name and Joshua is just his protégé. But the New Testament presents Joshua as an early picture of Jesus. They actually have the same name (the translations are different). And Joshua

becomes a picture of all of us who enter into adulthood and into a faith that we're invited to own.

- Joshua's protector, Moses, has died and now all the challenges and uncertainties and threats of his life are on Joshua's shoulders.
- But Joshua becomes a picture of who we're being made into—a godly warrior. In all our anxieties, we're invited to—like Joshua and Jesus—boldly walk into the life God is calling us into.
- V. 3: "I will give you every place where you set your foot." We have all the backing of the God of the Universe as we walk into his calling over our lives. V. 5: "No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life." There is tremendous promise as we obey God in our particular calling.
- And then there's the big command to you and me in all of our anxieties. V. 9: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Evidently, beyond helping us in our anxieties, God has the hope that we will become bold and courageous and confident. That is quite an antidote to anxiety!
- There is a prescription here as to how we can become so strong and courageous: Vv. 7-8: "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."
 - At that point of biblical history, the Law of Moses was the only direct means of connection to God that the people of Israel had. The point being made here was that success on these terms had to come with a love of, even a saturation in God himself and everything he wanted for his people. In that sense, meditating on the Bible day and night is powerful!
 - Paul does update the terms of this in Romans 8, Philippians 4 and elsewhere by focusing this "saturation" on the goodness of a God who can now be known to us by the Holy Spirit. So rejoicing in God and letting the Holy Spirit pray in and through us becomes his prescription.
 - The goal is to be strong and courageous and anxiety-free as you follow Jesus into your powerful life. The means to this will be immersion in the calling and power of the God who loves you.

Taking it home

The Psalms actually begin with a reference to this passage! So, today, let's pray Psalm 1 and see how God speaks to us and encourages us.

Psalm 1

¹ Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take

or sit in the company of mockers,

² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,

and who meditates on his law day and night.

³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,

which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—

whatever they do prospers.

⁴ Not so the wicked!

They are like chaff

that the wind blows away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,

nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶ For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,

but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Good Friday, March 30

As we come to the last day of our look at how Jesus's powerful words in the Sermon on the Mount on overcoming anxiety are a summation of an entire biblical theme, I thought it would be fun to see a profound way that all of that teaching was summarized in one enduring prayer that is known as "The Breastplate of Saint Patrick" from the 5th century. In his Confessions, we learn that Patrick's spiritual fight was against anxiety and into boldness. Let me give you the briefest of histories.

As a teenager, St. Patrick was kidnapped from England by Irish slave traders. He had not been a religious child, but his grandfather, a pastor, had made him memorize the entire book of Psalms because of his own love of Psalms praying. Patrick began praying the Psalms from memory and he found himself so transformed that he picked up a nickname: "Holy Youth." One day as he prayed his Psalms, he felt God was encouraging him to walk away and cross all of Ireland to the sea, where he believed that he find a boat that would take him back to his family in England. This carried real risks! If he spoke to anyone along the way, his accent would reveal him as an escaped slave and he'd be returned to his master and killed for escaping. He had no money. And, of course, he was banking on this mysterious boat actually being there and being willing to take him home.

With several miracles aiding him, Patrick does get home. Some time later, God seems to speak to him in a dream telling him to return to Ireland to preach Jesus. Ireland was druidic at the time, a particularly bloodthirsty form of religion. Patrick, who did go, expected to die there for several reasons. As a returned slave, of course he'd expect to be killed. But then, later in his journey when he became a controversial figure, he expected to be murdered for his challenge to druidism. All that said, by his death, Ireland had become overwhelmingly Jesus-following. His spiritual practice that led to such impact, he told us, was praying 100 Psalms a day as if they were his own prayers.

After his death, his followers took him one step further and prayed all 150 Psalms each day: 50 in the morning, 50 at noon, and 50 at night. This was their way of "meditating on God's law day and night." And many of them did this crazy thing: they went to sea in these round, oar-less boats called coracles. Wherever the sea took them, that's where they went. Most of course died at sea, but some washed up on the continent. Europe had been overrun in the so-called barbarian invasion, so Christianity had been wiped out. These Irish refugees preached Jesus, which led Europe back to Jesus and preserved Christianity for future generations. They also prevented libraries from being burned by the invaders and then copied their contents, which preserved Greek and Roman writings. (A fascinating look at this is in the bestselling book [How the Irish Saved Civilization](#) by Thomas Cahill.)

In his prayer "Breastplate of St. Patrick" he uses the phrase: I bind to myself today... "Binding" qualities to himself is his way of claiming all the power God would give him through the things

he's praying.

Today, let's try praying The Breastplate of St. Patrick as if it were our own prayer. I recommend giving it a run-through to get a feel for it, and then praying it again. If you'd like, try it a third time. Note how it makes you feel - Do you feel less anxious and more bold?

The Breastplate of St. Patrick

*I bind to myself today
An Invocation of the Trinity:
I believe the Trinity in the Unity
The Creator of the Universe.*

*I bind to myself today
The Incarnation of Christ with His Baptism,
His crucifixion with His burial,
His Resurrection with His Ascension,
His coming on the Judgment Day.*

*I bind to myself today
The love of seraphim,
In the obedience of angels,
In the hope of resurrection unto reward,
In prayers of Patriarchs,
In predictions of Prophets,
In preaching of Apostles,
In faith of Confessors,
In purity of holy Virgins,
In deeds of righteous men.*

*I bind to myself today
The power of Heaven,
The light of the sun,
The brightness of the moon,
The splendor of fire,
The flashing of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of sea,
The stability of earth,
The compactness of rocks.*

*I bind to myself today
God's Power to guide me,
God's Might to uphold me,
God's Wisdom to teach me,
God's Eye to watch over me,*

*God's Ear to hear me,
God's Word to give me speech,
God's Hand to guide me,
God's Way to lie before me,
God's Shield to shelter me,
God's Army to secure me,
Against the snares of demons,
Against the seductions of vices,
Against the lusts of nature,
Against everyone who meditates injury to me,
Whether far or near,
Whether few or with many.*

*I invoke today all these virtues
Against every hostile merciless power
Which may assail my body and my soul,
Against the incantations of false prophets,
Against the black laws of unbelief,
Against the false laws of heresy,
Against the deceits of idolatry,
Against the spells of sorcerers,
Against every knowledge that binds the soul of man.*

*Christ, protect me today
Against every poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against death-wound,
That I may receive abundant reward.*

*Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ at my right, Christ at my left,
Christ in the home, Christ in the street,
Christ in the shop,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks to me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.*

*I bind to myself today
An invocation of the Trinity,
I believe the Trinity in the Unity
The Creator of the Universe.*