

November 21, 2021 (Thanksgiving) - Mark Minnella

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Preacher: Mark Minnella

[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. You know, many people said that 2020 was a tough year, very stressful, and that they were hoping for a better 2021.

We're three weeks into November. What would you say so far? You know, they say the most stressful time of the year is the period between Thanksgiving and New Year's.

Would any of you agree with that? You start to worry about the four F's. Food, fun, finances, and family. I got to figure out the dinner.

I got to make sure everybody has a good time. And, oh my, it's time to buy presents. And what's that going to cost? And do we have to invite Uncle So-and-So? Food, fun, finances, and family. You start to worry about all kinds of problems that can happen. And, you know, somebody has said, 'Tis the season to be uptight. Have you been shopping yet?

[1:13] Nothing says the Christmas spirit like trying to find a parking spot. So maybe you're worrying more this time of year. We're going to be celebrating Thanksgiving.

How do you be thankful in tough times? When things in our country are not good. Have you put gas in your car lately? Maybe things aren't going your way at work or with family or friends.

For those of you that are parents, what about your kids? I got great news for you. You never stop worrying about them. How do you be thankful when times are tough?

In Philippians 4, Paul says in verses 4 through 6, Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Do not be anxious about anything. But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. Is that possible?

[2:18] Is it possible to always be joyful no matter what the circumstance? Well, the Word of God says it is. You know, it's our tradition every Sunday to share in the Lord's Supper.

And one of the words of the Lord's Supper in Greek is this word eucharistos. I grew up in a church where they called it the Eucharist. I never knew what it meant. It means, I receive with thanksgiving. I never knew that. Philippians 4, 7. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Verse 8. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

In this very short passage, we have the four keys to surviving a stressful world. Now, they're very simple to say. Maybe a lot more difficult to apply.

[3:28] So step number one, worry about nothing. Step two is pray about everything. Step three, thank God in all things. And step four, think about the right things.

So let's look at these, but first, let's pray. Our Father God, we have so much to be thankful for. For those of us that know you, just the fact that we could be unburdened of our sin, and that you took that upon yourself.

You sent your Son, who died in our place, to carry that sin to the cross, and that he rose again for our justification. I pray that in these next few moments that your word would enter our hearts, and it would change who we are, so that we would become more like him.

We ask this in his name. Amen. So step one, worry about nothing. Verse six says, do not be anxious about anything. That's pretty much the same as worry, anxiety.

How many of you would agree that that's a lot easier said than done? You know, we must be careful sometimes when someone shares a burden with us, you know, not to say something like, hey, don't worry about anything.

[4:45] A little anxiety, a little empathy can go a long way, right? So we have to be careful about that. You know, having spent some time in poorer countries, you would think that people who have to scrape by just to eat, who have to figure out how they're going to pay rent or where they're going to stay, and you would think that people that are just existing on a day-to-day basis, you would think that those folks would have a lot more to worry about.

We're here, where we have cars to save time, automatic washers and dryers to save time, temperature-controlled houses, too much food. All the things that should take the worry out of life. You know, who would you think worries more? People in third-world cultures or rich Americans? Interestingly, I would tell you that I have observed the more people have, the more they worry. Most people here get up in the morning to an alarm clock. It sets you off in a negative mood right away. It's an alarm clock, you know. They don't call it a comfort clock. Get up. Let's go. And then maybe they turn on the TV.

Well, it's not enough if you have your own problems, right? You have to hear about all the problems in the country and the rest of the world, and we won't get into those. And maybe they get in their car and they turn on all-talk radio.

[6:06] Boy, there's a cheerful place. And so they get to work, and it's no wonder that they're stressed out. But we who know the Lord, we're supposed to worry about nothing.

Do not be anxious about anything. You know, maybe start each day off in the Word. There was a study done by Dr. Walter Calvert.

I believe it was 2006. I didn't write the year down. But it was funded by the National Science Foundation. And it revealed some startling statistics about human beings and worry.

It says this. 30% of our worries are about events in the past. 40% of the things that we worry about never happen.

12% of our worries are unfounded health concerns. 10% of our worries are over minor and trivial issues. And only 8% of our worries are real, legitimate issues.

[7:09] So what can we take from this study? Don't dwell on the past. It's over. Don't agonize over the future. Just live in the present.

Focus all your energy, your talent, your commitment, and compassion on the moment. And know that wherever you are at any given moment in time, that you're part of a larger universal plan.

You know, my brother-in-law, he loves to say that phrase from The Lion King. It's Hakuna Matata. In Swahili, that literally means there are no worries. And so you'll talk to my brother-in-law sometimes about something serious.

He and my sister, they're building a house right now, and I think it's a year and a half behind schedule. And I ask him the other day, I go, how does that make you feel? My sister's, well, you know.

And he goes, Hakuna Matata. You know, I got a place to live, and they're building me another one. I don't know. Pretty neat. Pretty neat. Dr. Calvert discovered that 40% of our worries never happen.

[8:13] 40% we don't even have to worry about, they're never going to happen. 40% of the things people worry about don't even happen. And so, could we say this? If you had a list of 10 worries, you could just take four of them and throw them away.

All right? Because they're never going to happen. 30% of people's worries are about the past. You know, worry can't change the past, right? I often say some people can't get past their past.

It's sad. Maybe they had a bad family. Maybe a bad parent. Or maybe two bad parents. Maybe they just can't get past their past. You know anyone like that? I know a guy.

I know a guy. The guy I know, he was 16 years old. He was the star of his baseball team. In fact, he was so good, there were scouts that would go to their game.

He was the star of the baseball team. He was the most popular kid in his high school. Lived in California. Kind of a good-looking young man. And really very, very popular.

[9:12] Probably one of those popular kids in his high school. And then his dad got a job in St. Louis. And moved the family to St. Louis. Well, he showed up at Lindbergh High School.

Nobody knew his name. 4,400 kids. Coach Gately, the baseball coach, is a well-known jerk. Didn't like this fella. Didn't give him a place on the baseball team.

And so, he really kind of went backward. Didn't have any friends. Had kind of a crappy dad. Couldn't play sports.

Didn't really have anything. You know, the sad part is that that guy today, he's been married and divorced three times. Never really been able to hang on to a job much.

And very, very sad. He's 65 years old and working at Walmart. Really a sad thing. And really all because he couldn't get past his past.

[10:14] You know, all worry does is mess up today. You can worry about the past all you want, but it's not going to change it. The past is over. It's dead. 2 Corinthians 5, 17 says this.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone. The new is here. Worry cannot control the past.

It just messes you up right now. So, we can't control the past and worrying won't change the future. So, 40% of it's not going to happen anyway. 70% of our worries then are really worthless, right? According to the study, 12% of our worries are needless health concerns. 10% of our worries are insignificance and petty issues. So, only 8% of our worries are actual legitimate concerns, according to this guy.

That's what that study concluded. Worrying really doesn't change anything. Someone said it's stewing without doing. You know, there are no such thing as born worriers.

[11:20] There's not a gene for it. Worrying is a learned response. You might have learned it from your parents, learned it from your peers, your teachers, learned it from experience, people you listen to.

Well, that's good news. Because the fact that it's a learned behavior, it can also be unlearned. How do we unlearn it? How do we change? Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 6, verse 34.

Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow. For tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. What he's saying here is that you don't open your umbrella before it starts raining.

Don't worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow. Tomorrow. Today is the tomorrow you're worried about yesterday. If you want the key for reducing stress in your life, you live one day at a time.

Yes, I know we have to plan. We have to make schedules. I'm not talking about that. In fact, I would say this. For those of you who are planners and schedulers, write your plan. Write your schedule.

[12:30] Really, write it out. I know if you're younger than me, your schedule's on your phone. I understand. But listen, take your schedule. Write it out. And make your plans.

But lay it before the Lord and say, God, here's what I'm planning. All right? I have to write my vacation schedule a year ahead of time so I get in front of all those other guys. All right. But you say, Lord, here's my plan.

This is what I think. You know, we don't just sit still. God can't steer a ship if it's still in port. So we move forward, but we say, Lord, I'm leaving room for you to steer the ship.

You're the rudder. And this is my plan for here. And here's my plans for this. And here's my plans for my family. But God, you're in control. Leave room for the Lord to operate.

Don't worry about tomorrow. Focus on today. Focus on today's issues and problems. Worry about nothing. It's interesting that when Paul wrote this letter, where was he? He was in a Roman prison.

[13:29] He was in a dungeon. And he's saying, don't worry. Don't worry. You know, whenever God tells us to do something, he usually has a positive replacement.

God rarely just says, don't. There's always a do. And so anytime he says, eliminate this from your life, he wants us to add something else.

There's a second step. And that second step is, number two, pray about everything. Pray about everything. So we got to pray about a boo-boo today. That was pretty neat.

Hey, that's important. Instead of worrying, we ought to pray. In everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

If you have time to worry, you have time to pray. If we use the time we use for worrying, for praying, then I bet we have less time to worry and less things to worry about.

[14:23] Does that make any sense? I need to get better at that. Notice it says in everything, not just in some things, but in everything, we can pray about it.

God is concerned about the big things and the small things. He knows every detail of our lives. Matthew 10:30 says this, There's a joke there somewhere.

For some of us, those numbers are getting a little smaller. But anyway, I didn't bring one up here, but on the back table, there's some books.

I talked about this a while back. On Psalm 23, A Shepherd's Look at Psalm 23. I want to tell you, if you haven't ever read that book, if there's any doubt in your mind that God cares about you and how the great shepherd takes care of his sheep, you need to pick up one of those books and read that book.

It's amazing. But the God who made every fingerprint unique, the God who made every voice print unique, the God who made every snowflake unique, every person unique, He has no problem handling the details of our lives.

[15:43] There's nothing we cannot pray about. If it's worth worrying about, it's worth praying about. There's nothing that's insignificant to God. We can pray about anything, and we can pray about everything.

It says there, pray with petition. What does that mean? A petition means a specific, detailed, direct prayer. You know, many people have vague prayers.

They'll pray something like, God bless this person. What does that mean? What's a blessing? Is that some kind of a warm, fuzzy feeling? I don't know. You know, many times a problem is a blessing.

We need to be specific. We need to use petition. We need to pray about things in detail. 1 Peter 5, 7 says, There's a story that goes all the way back to when Denise and I were living in Belize some 30-odd years ago, and we were privileged to start a Bible study in the neighboring town.

There was a lady who sent her three children to our Awana Club, and she said, You know, there's no church out in our town, and there's no Bible study out in our town, and would you be willing to drive out and have a Bible study?

[17:01] So we agreed, and on Wednesday nights, we would get in our vehicle, and we would drive out to this little village about 10 miles out of town, and we had a Bible study at this lady's house. It ended up growing. It really became a neat thing.

We were teaching on something like this at the time, and we were saying about how God can take all of our problems, and even all of our sin, and everything, and God is so big, and there's nothing, you know, and I'm explaining to these kids, right, there's nothing God can't do.

And this little boy, I guess he was about 10 or 11 years old, he said, he got it. You could see the light go on, and he goes, God is able to back a heavy load. Back means to carry in their culture, okay?

And he got it. God is able to carry everybody's problems. It doesn't weigh him down. God is able to back a heavy load. That's what God says to do with our worries.

Dump them on him. Unload them. And we need to unload our problems through prayer. Wouldn't that be great? Lots of studies have been done, and they've all found this.

[18:11] If you attend church regularly, then you live longer than people who don't. Actually, insurance companies, some of them actually know this. I don't think I get a discount for coming here, but it'd be nice.

But I did some research, and I found out it can vary anywhere from just a few years up to eight years longer than people who attend church regularly.

Doesn't that make you feel healthy? Why do people who go to church regularly live years longer than those who don't? Well, one guess is those people who go to church, they don't worry as much.

They let God take their worries for them. You see, if you don't give it to God, you've got to carry it yourself. And worry can make you sick. I'm sure there are other reasons, too.

So 1 Peter 5, 7 in the Phillips translation says it this way. You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon him, for you are his personal concern.

[19:11] James says you do not have because you do not ask God. We should be asking God to help us with our worries and our problems. You know, there's no problem that's too big or too small to pray about.

Paul says here, what you do if you want less stress, you worry about nothing. Instead, you pray about everything. Simple, but it's something we have to learn over and over, I think.

And third, we thank God in all things. In everything, when you pray, pray with thanksgiving. The Good News translation says, always asking him with a thankful heart.

Whenever we pray, we should always pray with thanksgiving. Have an attitude of gratitude. People who are grateful are happy. People who are ungrateful are miserable because nothing ever makes them happy.

You know people like that? Oh, man. Grateful people are always happy. If you cultivate an attitude of gratitude, being thankful in everything, it lowers your stress, and it just makes life more joyful.

[20:12] You know, there's an old song that some of you may remember. Count your blessings, name them one by one. Remember that song? I think that's a good thing to do.

Sit down and make a list and write down the things you're thankful for. You know, my wife and kids, they all know the Lord. I have this wonderful church family, Bethel Community Church. And, you know, I've enjoyed pretty good health most of my life.

And just try making a list of things that you're thankful for. You know, I've heard that some people say it's a family tradition that at Thanksgiving, they each take turns saying at least one thing they're thankful for.

We've done that before. Well, today I'd like to do that. Not now. After. I have these little strips of paper up here and some pens. And you're going to write down a couple things that you're thankful for.

And you're going to fold it up, put it in this box, and then you're going to take one out from somebody else. And that week you're going to pray and thank God for that other person. You know, we used to do this many, many years ago in a little church I used to go to.

[21:14] And we would do prayer requests that way. We would write down a couple of things that were burdening us. And we'd take somebody else's and we'd pray for them for that week. It was really a neat thing. And so we're going to do that this week, this Thanksgiving week.

Write down a couple things you're thankful for and grab somebody else's and pray with them for that week. And we'll see how this cheers us up a bit. And also I think it'll make us closer.

1 Thessalonians 5.18 Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. I want you to notice the word in. That's one of the most important words to keep us from misinterpreting this verse.

You see, it does not say give thanks for every circumstance. That's often a misinterpretation. You'll probably hear that on television if you watch those preacher guys.

They'll say things like, you should give thanks for everything. Well, the Bible doesn't teach that. It doesn't say that. It says give thanks in every circumstance. See, if I have an accident, I don't wreck my car and get out and go, praise the Lord.

[22:20] I just smashed my new car. No, you don't do that. That's not biblical Christianity, right? We don't give thanks for evil in the world. We don't give thanks for war and for murders and things like that.

The Bible doesn't say to be thankful for bad stuff. It says in every circumstance, give thanks. Not for every circumstance. In every circumstance. You know, my son Daniel has learned to look for God in everything.

I think it's a tremendous trait. I think he learned it from Dottie St. Clair. But when things go wrong, when things are bad, rather than just throwing up your hands and oh my. Say, well, what?

I wonder what God is doing. I wonder what God's doing. Look for God in those times. He's always doing something. So you give thanks in advance.

God, I don't know what I'm going through. I don't know why I'm going through this. But I thank you that I know that you're in control. You can at least do that. And I can give thanks to God because of this.

[23:22] Number one, I know that he has a bigger purpose than the problem. And number two, that he will give me the power to overcome this problem. And number three, I will grow through the experience if I allow that experience to help me grow.

So in every situation, even in the bad ones, I can be thankful. Because I know that God is greater than my problem. A lot of people have asked me over the years, how do I know God's will for my life?

Well, there's something right here. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. You want to know God's will for your life? This could be a great place to start.

Give thanks in all circumstances. You know, we here in America, we take so much for granted. This week, we're celebrating Thanksgiving.

What about you? What are you thankful for? Worry about nothing. I pray about everything.

[24:26] I give thanks in all things. And number four, I think about the right things. Verse eight, finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy.

Think about such things. The fourth point here is that none of us use our brains to our potential, the potential that God has given us. Whatever we put in our brain is what's going to come out of us. Whatever we feed our mind, whatever we think, that's going to come out. As a person thinks, there he is. Because the way we think determines the way we feel, and the way we feel determines the way we act.

It says, if you want to change your life, if we want to change our lives, we need to change what we're thinking about. If we're reading the headlines, if we're playing video games, if we're watching television, more than we're reading God's word, that could determine how we think and how we act. Fix your mind on those things. That involves a deliberate, conscious choice where we choose to think about the right things. Focus on the positive and on God's word. You know, for me, it's about perspective.

[25:46] Reading the word, spending time with God, with his people, it gives me perspective. It puts things in order. So that when I see things, I hear things, I experience things, I can look to God and his word to interpret those things.

That's a choice. I wish I could stand here and tell you that that's the choice I always make. But I can, and I should. How we choose to look at the problem or situation we're going through right now can determine how we'll deal with it.

I worry about nothing. I pray about everything. I give thanks in all things. And I think about the right things.

Musicians can come up. I'm going to make one last point. The last point I want to make is this. In Christ Jesus. It says, in Christ Jesus. None of this stuff counts.

None of it matters. And none of it works if you are not in Christ Jesus. You see, if you're here today and you don't know for sure that you're in Christ Jesus.

[26:57] You don't know that God took the burden of your sin and laid it on his son. And his son died with my sin on him. If you don't know that for sure, man, don't go through another Thanksgiving without saying, thank you, God, for dying in my place and for paying my price.

Let's pray. Father, God, we just thank you so much. We have so much to be thankful for. Not just the material things, but more than anything, we have to be thankful for a God who loves us unconditionally.

A God who knows the worst about us and still chooses to love us. That's amazing. It's amazing that you took all the bad things that I ever did and you paid for them.

And you rose again. And you promised us everlasting life with you. A guarantee. Thanks so much for that. Thank you.