

Hey Creek Family. I'm glad to be able to be with you today, and I hope you are doing well. Over the last several weeks, as I've talked to people in our church and throughout our community, one of the things that has stood out to me is how differently this unique season is hitting us. Some people I've talked to have contracted the virus and been sick and quarantined away from their family in a small little room. I've sat with people who have lost loved ones, and who haven't even been able to grieve as we would typically expect. Many have lost jobs or been furloughed or had pay cuts - a financial insecurity out of their control like many have never experienced before. And while all that is going on, there's also a lot of people who are perfectly fine, sitting in their homes, wanting to be of help to anyone in need and wondering when life is going to get back to normal. As a community, this is hitting all of us, but it's hitting all of us differently. I heard one person say: "We are all in the same storm together, but we are riding it out in different boats." What I hope we can all recognize is that no matter which boat you might be in or I might be in, we are all in need of the grace of God; you might need one expression of grace, I might need another, our mutual friend or neighbor might need a third. The good news is that God's grace is there for us, we know that he will meet our needs, above and beyond what we could ever ask for, and hopefully we can also be a conduit of the grace of God into the lives of others during this time, too!

I saw a news post this week of a man in Connecticut who, during the lockdown, broke into a restaurant that was closed because of the pandemic, and he spent 4 days inside on a non-stop binge, eating all of his favorite foods in the restaurant and drinking - get this - *seventy* bottles of liquor. I know we are supposed to shelter in place, but I'm pretty sure that falls outside of the protocol!

We are in this series called "Take Heart," where we are looking at Jesus' words to us about courage and faith in the midst of a crisis. We kicked this series off two weeks ago on Easter and looked at what Jesus said to his followers during the last night of his life. He told them "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart. For I have overcome the world." We talked about how, on the very first Easter, Jesus found his disciples in a house, by themselves, locked behind closed doors on a self-imposed quarantine because they were afraid that the same people who killed Jesus were going to come and try to kill them, too. But Jesus, who had risen from the dead, walked through the locked doors and showed the disciples that he really had risen from the dead, and then told them that because he had won this victory, they had no reason to be afraid.

Last week, Chad Monahan walked us through the passage where Jesus sent his disciples onto the lake and into a storm - but it wasn't because Jesus didn't know that the storm was coming, and it's not as though he didn't check his weather app or that he wanted to play a trick on them. Jesus planned to reveal himself to his disciples in the midst of the storm and display his power and authority over the storm. We learned that no matter what storms we might face in life, Jesus will be with us in them and Jesus has dominion over them. That's why we can take heart!

Today, we get to dive into an incredible passage of Scripture. We are going to be looking at a few verses that are unbelievably relevant for the situation we find ourselves in. In fact, we are

actually going to be looking at the single most popular passage in the entire Bible right now. Did you know that Amazon releases data at the end of every year? Not just about which books have sold the most, but also on which passages in each book are highlighted the most. And of all the passages in the entire bible, Amazon says that from their millions of users, the passage that we are going to look at today is the single most highlighted passage in all of Scripture. It shows up in bright yellow on people's kindles and phones more than any other. Any guesses as to what that passage of Scripture is? Of all 31,102 verses...it is Philippians 4:4-7. It's a passage that talks to us about how to respond to anxiety, and how, as followers of Christ, we can overcome it. If you have your bibles with you, would you turn there with me?

Most of us have dealt with anxiety to varying degrees at one point in our life or another. Maybe there was instability in your home growing up, or your parents fought or divorced, or there was even violence in your home. That's real reason for anxiety. Maybe you came from a stable home with parents who loved you, but you felt like they placed an expectation of perfection on you, and if you came home with anything less than an A, you'd sense their disappointment and disapproval. You could answer 99 questions on a test right, get one wrong, and feel like an utter failure. So you'd worry about your grades to the point of giving yourself ulcers. Maybe you're single and feel anxious about never being married. Maybe you are dating someone and feel anxious that you like them more than they like you, or anxious about the weight of commitment, the list could go on. Maybe you've experienced anxiety about things at work or about finances - I think that's about half of all Americans right now. Maybe your kids are struggling, and you lose sleep almost every night, tossing and turning, worrying and hoping that they'll be alright.

I know in my own life the times of greatest anxiety have come from a variety of areas. Anxiety has come when there was relational conflict with someone, especially if it was someone in authority over me; anxiety has come when I was entrusted with leadership during a stressful season and I didn't know what the outcome was going to be. I've had anxiety when Keren and I weren't able to see eye to eye on something and we couldn't find a resolution in the time frame I wanted. I remember wrestling with anxiety when we found out Keren was pregnant with Hudson. Before Hudson, we went through two miscarriages - they were heartbreaking. So difficult to endure for so many reasons. So when we found out we are expecting another child, we didn't know if we should celebrate and jump up and down like we did the first time, should we hold our breath, should we tell anyone? What were the actual chances that we'd be able to welcome this child into the world, hold them, raise them, love them? Then when my son Hudson was born came a different type of anxiety. When Keren and Hudson were in the car together I'd worry about whether or not they would be safe. I'd text Keren again and again, "Are you ok? Are you ok?" - which of course, texting her while she was driving wasn't going to help her stay safe! But that's how anxiety works. It doesn't deal with rationality and logic. And speaking of being anxious about having kids, I'm stressing out all over again - Keren and I are excited to share with you that we are expecting our second child! We have a due date in October. So far as we know, everything is healthy and progressing as the doctors would hope! So now, as much as ever, we appreciate your prayers for our family. They mean so much. Not having family in town, this church is like family to us, and we are so, so grateful.

Anyone who has lived just a little bit of life understands that anxiety can come from so many different angels, for so many reasons, at any given time. But it hits us particularly hard here in

America. Do you know which country leads the world with anxiety? Take a guess. That's right, it's Switzerland. No! Of course it's not Switzerland. It's us. It's America. We just have to come in first in everything, don't we? We'd have anxiety if we didn't! Did you know that anxiety is the number one health issue in America for women? It's number two for men, but I think if men weren't so anxious about admitting we struggle with anxiety, it would be number one for us, too! In America, more than 40 million people are wrestling with anxiety, and the number keeps growing exponentially. 48 billion dollars a year is spent on treating anxiety, and that number is going up exponentially, as well. And think, why would that happen in a country like ours? By just about any metric, we are the safest, most prosperous, most empowered and liberated nation in the history of the world. And yet anxiety is all across our land, from sea to shining sea.

Did you know that when people move to America from impoverished parts of the world - when they leave crime and poverty, lack of education and next to no employment opportunities and they come to the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have plenty of food and exceptional healthcare, great jobs and a really high life expectancy - do you know what happens to them? Their anxiety goes up! They go from a place of insecurity and poverty to a place of safety and affluence and somehow they begin to worry more than ever. And all of that was before America became the epicenter for a global pandemic!

That's the situation we find ourselves in. And into our world, a world filled with worry and anxiety, uncertainty and sleeplessness, counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists, Xanax, Prozac, and a pandemic, we open up Philippians 4 and read this: "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 requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

I think we can see why this passage has been highlighted so many times, can't we? The hope and truths found in these verses are profound. Now before we go any further I want to be sure to recognize that there is a type of anxiety and depression that is so severe that it really does require professional help. Help from doctors, and help from medication that can regulate chemicals and create balance and stability. Doctors and medicines are a gift from God and when need be, we should take advantage of having access to them. But we have to remember we are not just physical beings, and oftentimes our anxiety or depression is not just physical. We are emotional beings, we are relational beings, we are spiritual beings. And God, through his word, gives us a roadmap on how to respond to the challenges and difficulties that we face that can cause anxiety or depression. So there are many who might be listening who are under a doctors care or medication that is helpful for you. It would probably be most wise for you to continue with that regiment. Let this teaching augment and add to the steps you are already taking.

In the passage we just read, Paul begins by saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" The command to rejoice is given not once, but twice - and this is so important to take note of - it's not a command to rejoice in our circumstances, not a command to rejoice in the stability of our families, in the health of our bodies, in the prosperity of our finances. It is a command to rejoice in the Lord! We all know this: circumstances can and will change. God never does. People can fail you. God never will. The command is to rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice

in his perfect character and profound holiness, rejoice in his unconditional love and limitless grace, rejoice that he is sovereignly reigning over the world and at the same time intimately living inside of each one of us. Rejoice in the Lord.

I have walked with a lot of people through seasons of serious anxiety, and one common denominator I have found, almost across the spectrum, is that at some point in their journey, something happened that caused them to their eyes off the Lord. Instead of focusing God, they found themselves focused, even fixated, on a problem, on a person, on a relationship, on a job, on a rejection letter, on a diagnosis - and instead of just looking at that thing, whatever it happened to be, taking assessment of it, and then turning their attention back to God, they end up putting almost all of their focus on that thing, and then only occasionally glancing at God.

Maybe even as you hear that, you can identify times in your life when that has happened to you. I know I can. Here's what we have to realize: that's not the game plan anyone intentionally chooses. We don't usually cognitively decide to marginalize God and fixate on our source of anxiety, but it's like that source of anxiety, whatever it is, has a gravitational field that keeps pulling our thoughts and focus toward it, and it's not a weak gravitational field like a meteor or an asteroid has, it it's gravitation field like a black hole, it has the power to suck almost every thought of every moment into it. Maybe you've been there before. Maybe you are there right now. What causes that to happen? And what do we need to do to alter course?

Last summer Keren, Hudson, and I were on vacation in Florida. We were there with Keren's brother, his wife, and their two kids, twins, who were just two years old at the time. We were playing in the pool together and I was throwing Hudson in the air, which looked like fun to my nephew and niece, and they wanted to get in the pool, too. So Matt, my brother in law, who was standing in the pool, told his son to come and jump into his arms. Now, my nephew has been in the pool dozens of times, he had floaties on his arms, and his dad was right there to catch him. He had every reason in the world to feel safe. But do you know what he did? Of course you do, because you've seen the same scenario played out a hundred times with other kids! He got right up to the edge...and got scared. He refused to jump, even after his dad told him 25 consecutive times that he would catch him. That moment can be kind of frustrating for a dad. Because that dad is an adult, he is big and strong and is, of course, able to keep his kid safe. No dad in that scenario would ever, ever let something bad happen to his child. Now my nephew wasn't able to understand that at the time. And that's okay...because he was 2 years old. As he grows, and as every time he jumps into his daddy's arms he realizes he's safe, his anxiety will eventually go down, his confidence will rise, and his joy and range of opportunities available to him will increase exponentially.

I hope the connection is not too hard to make. Sometimes in life, even though our heavenly father is right there, promising to be by our side, promising to uphold us and give us everything we need, we get paralyzed by anxiety and fear. And in that moment, not only do we lose out on the experience and joy that was available to us, but it's an indication that we have either taken our focus off of our heavenly father, or if we are focusing on him, we are not currently living in the reality of who our heavenly father actually is, or we aren't thinking about God rightly or relating to him as we should.

Fear, anxiety, depression, despair all flourish and thrive when we do not think about God as he truly is, or perhaps we even end up believing lies about God. There are three specific lies about God that if we end up believing will paralyze us or send us into a tailspin. I like to call these three lies the Bermuda triangle of bad theology.

Most of us know about the Bermuda triangle. An area north of the Caribbean Sea that has been reported to disorient travelers. Numerous ships and aircraft have been lost in that exact area. And it's not because there is some alien life force that has a portal there - it just so happens to be in an area where there is a convergence of intense weather patterns, of strong currents, and where even some report compasses don't operate as usual due to the magnetic field there. If you are traveling and get caught in this area, you might get disoriented and lose your way.

We understand that geographically, but what about theologically? We can get disoriented and lost if we end up believing things about God that are not true. So what are those three lies - the Bermuda triangle of bad theology? Here they are: (1) God doesn't know about me and my situation, (2) God doesn't care about me and my situation, and (3) God can't do anything about me and my situation. Any one of those lies is dangerous, but if we end up believing in two or them or all three, we will be overwhelmed by anxiety and depression. And why wouldn't we? That's an anxious, depressing place to be.

The fortunate reality for us is that those beliefs are the furthest thing from reality possible. Instead of wandering aimlessly through the Bermuda triangle of bad theology, the Bible calls us to ground ourselves and take confidence in the truth of who God really is. This is why theology, which means thinking rightly about God and relating rightly to God, matters so much.

Let me share three theological words with you and then define each of them: Omniscience. Omnipotence. Omnibenevolence. Omniscience means that God knows everything - he knows everything about the world in general, and everything about you and your life and your present situation perfectly. Omnipotence means that God has the power and ability to do whatever he wants. He is in charge. He is sovereign. He is in control of the world, and he is in control of your world. Omnibenevolence means that God will only ever do the best possible thing. God is good. He is light, he is truth, he is love. Just as the bible tells us that it is impossible for God to lie or impossible for God to sin, it is impossible for God to ever do anything besides the best possible thing. He is all good.

Omniscience. Omnipotence. Omnibenevolence. That is who God is. That's why Paul says in Philippians 4 we are to rejoice in the Lord. That is a God worth rejoicing in! And not just rejoicing in the Lord occasionally, or often, we are to rejoice in the Lord *always*! Friends, can I remind you, God knows everything about you, he knows exactly what you are going through right now, he sees you, he is in complete control, and he will always only ever do what is best. Instead of being tossed and turned around in the Bermuda triangle of bad theology we need to rejoice in God and celebrate those truths about God as part of our offense threat against anxiety and depression.

Last Sunday ESPN released a new series about Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls, documenting the final season of their dynasty. Their coach, Phil Jackson, not only had great

players on his team, he devised a strategy called the triangle offense, which has players always rotating on the court, moving strategically if they didn't have the ball, to create a triangle with three players, each about 15-20 feet apart. The triangle offense makes double teams nearly impossible, opens up passing lanes, and results in much better shot opportunities - and it also led to coach Phil Jackson winning 11 championships, more than anyone else in history. That's the power of the triangle offense!

Now let's apply that to what we've been talking about. Claiming those three truths about God, that he knows us, that he is in control, and that he always only does what is good is the perfect triangle offense against anxiety, depression, and against countless other lies the enemy may try to speak to us. When we claim the truths of who God really is, and we focus on them, we live out of them, we worship God because of them, it doesn't make all of our problems go away, it doesn't remove in every obstacle, every pain, every hardship, every pandemic, but it gives us the perspective we so desperately need AND gives us something productive to do with our worries. Instead of focusing on our worries, being consumed by our worries, being pulled into anxiety or depression by our worries, we get to take those worries to our all knowing, all powerful, all good God and trust him to take care of them. Remember Paul says in 4:6: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Paul used three different words, all of which point to a singular action. Instead of being anxious he told us to bring our prayers, petitions and requests to God. So we can either worry about what's going on, bite our nails and focus on what little we can do, or we can go to God and ask him to do far beyond anything we could accomplish on our own. The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything. Let me say that again: the way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything. What I have found is that when my anxiety level is up, it's because my prayer life is down. When my prayer life is up, my anxiety level is down. That's why Max Lucado says the presence of anxiety is unavoidable, but the prison of anxiety is optional. Think about that: the *presence* of anxiety is unavoidable, but the *prison* of anxiety is optional. Anxious situations are going to present themselves. We can't avoid them, but we can decide what to do when they happen: we focus on the truth of who God is and we take our concerns and worries to him in prayer.

And not just any kind of prayer, Paul says in every situation, by prayer and petition, *with thanksgiving*, we are to present our requests to God. Which means we don't go to God defeated, moping and dejected, we don't go to God trying to twist his arm with eloquent words or by making grand promises we can't keep. No! We come to him with our petitions and at the same time with our praise. We come to him with the things we are worried about and at the same time we come to him with our worship. We give him the glory and honor at the beginning of the story, in the middle of the story, and at the end.

So we are going to keep our focus on God, not our source of anxiety, we are going to claim the truths that God is all knowing, all powerful, and all good, we are going to bring our concerns to him, and with thanksgiving turn those worries into prayers. And what does Paul say happens as we do that? 4:7, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

We need the peace of God right now as much as ever. And peace comes when we stand in the center of that triangle, when we claim the truths about who God is, and pray. God can handle whatever it is that is causing anxiety and worry in your life. If Jesus was willing to carry the cross for you, he's willing to carry this burden for you. If he is capable of having us trust our entire lives to him and our eternities to him, he is capable of having us trust him with whatever problems and difficulties life throws our way. He's good. He's powerful. He can handle it.

There is a lot more I want to say about this topic. We don't have time to cover it all in one week, so be sure to join us next Sunday as we talk about part two of this message and learn how to build upon the foundation we laid today.

Right now, we have the opportunity to take communion. If you want to prepare whatever elements you have that represent the body and the blood of Jesus, let's spend some time thanking Jesus for the price he paid, the life he gave, the death he died, the ultimate reminder that he loves us, is for us, and that we can trust him with whatever it is we are going through.

Let's pray.