



WILLOW CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT

FLOW, PART 6: ANXIETY, Part 2

JOHN ORTBERG

4/9/03

Job loss, finances, divorce, unsettled family matters—all can be objects of anxiety. Worry, however, is not a direct product of circumstances, but is due to vulnerability and a loss of power. In Philippians 4:13, the apostle Paul encourages both the early Christians and us that “I [we] can do all things through Christ who gives me [us] strength.” Paul’s relationship with God was so intimate that even when he was arrested, tortured, and chained to sentry guards, he still preached to anyone who would listen. Paul became fearless because the Holy Spirit strengthened him. We, too, can reach this boldness by having a continual relationship with Christ. As we continue to grow, the Holy Spirit will give us peace and we will ride effortlessly on the wave of his grace. Jesus reminds us: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

© 2003 Willow Creek Association • P.O. Box 3188 • Barrington, Illinois 60011-3188
Phone: (847) 765-0070 • Fax: (847) 765-5046 • Customer Service (800) 570-9812
Purchase of this product is non-transferable between churches or organizations and cannot be resold. Message can be used in its entirety with appropriate attribution. Quotes or references or paraphrases must also be attributed to Willow Creek and the speaker. This message may also be used as research material or as reference.

And then my job is just to not mess up. It's to not get in the way of the flow of the Spirit, to not grieve the Spirit, to not quench the Spirit.

Then we said if somebody enters into this way of life, if somebody becomes a fully devoted follower—what we talk about so much around here—we're going to think about how his or her life ought to change.

Over and over in the New Testament, the Bible uses the metaphor of putting off certain things and putting on certain things. We're dividing those kinds of destructive tendencies up into four categories using the acronym RAGS, because we're putting off these rags. The "R" stands for resentment, mismanaged anger. "A" stands for anxiety, fear. "G" stands for greed, mismanaged desire. And "S" stands for superiority, a spirit of smugness and self-righteousness.

And we're really serious about putting off these rags and replacing them with the character of Christ. We're not going to get legalistic or mechanical about it, but we really are going to expect that over time we'll develop people who don't just tread water, who don't just observe rules, who don't just engage in certain external behaviors or programs, but who are really going to enter into a new kind of life.

That's what we're learning. And we're reviewing this because our expectation is that this becomes what we think about and talk about in terms of spiritual growth—one of the five G's in full devotion.

Turn to the Book of Philippians. We're going to walk through this letter tonight and look at how this man Paul, who was a human being like all of us, increasingly learned to put off anxiety and to put on peace. Look at Philippians 4:6-7. These two verses are really kind of a creedal text when it comes to this "A"—to this anxiety of RAGS.

This is what Paul writes: *Do not be anxious about anything.* Now, just think about that one statement for a moment. Paul is really serious about this, and we'll see Paul had some things to be anxious about. *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* And then there is this promise, this offer, this opportunity, which is not about you trying to work harder. *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Paul says, *Do not be anxious about anything.* Now, if we're serious about this, if you really want to overcome anxiety, you will need a couple of pieces of equipment. The first thing that you will need is a problem, because if you never have a problem, you never have the opportunity to learn how not to worry about it, and you can never grow. So how many of you have at least one problem, or you know where you can get one? [laughter] How many of you are sitting next to someone who looks like they've got a problem? [laughter] How many of you are sitting next to your problem? [laughter] That's a category for some.

I want to give you an equation for worry. We're tempted to think that worrying is caused by our problems; so if God wants me to worry less, he ought to just give me fewer problems. But worry doesn't work that way. There is a Harvard researcher, a Christian, by the name of Ed Hallowell.