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MEDITATIONS ON FEAR, WORRY, AND TRUST

A SMALL BOOK FOR THE

ANXIOUS

HEART

Day 27

Grace for Today

Everyone is interested in ways to quiet fears. This has led some to Eastern religions with their interest in breathing and mindfulness—techniques for being present and in the moment. They focus on not living in the past, not living in the future, but living now. Although these miss the personal God, in their focus on the present they have noticed one of the features of biblical wisdom.

Think manna. For forty years in the Sinai wilderness the Lord gave his people manna one day at a time. If they tried to save some for the next day, it grew moldy. The only time they could keep it overnight was in preparation for the Sabbath, when they were to rest from work. The Lord was teaching his people to depend on him one day at a time. Each morning they had to trust him again that the bread from heaven would fall from the sky.

We could substitute the word *grace* for manna. Grace, like manna, is God's gift during our neediness. But grace is bigger than manna. It sustains us and gives us power. The Lord will give us all the grace we need for today. Tomorrow he will give us the grace we need for tomorrow. When you try to think about tomorrow without having yet received power for tomorrow, you will be anxious.

With the promise of grace in hand, Jesus invites you for a walk outside in God's world (Matthew 6:25–34). Together you walk by birds that are thriving because your Father cares for them. He teases you about your worries by asking if they can make you taller. He points out the generosity of his Father as you witness the lavish beauty of creation. He reminds you that those beautiful lilies along the road don't have to work, and yet they are wonderfully clothed. He concludes by bringing your attention to the present.

Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes. (Matthew 6:34, The Message)

Your worries are taking you away from the present, where God is at work. Perhaps you think that God will not be with you tomorrow. Perhaps you think that after rescuing you and bringing you into his family by what his Son has done, he might abandon you in your time of need. Not true.

He will give you power for right now. He is doing something right now. In the midst of chaos, the Spirit often gives us a simple and clear mission, such as choosing to trust in God's love, listening to another person, helping someone in his or her need, or preparing lunch. Your God has made you a partner in bringing his kingdom to earth. Look around to see what he is doing and how he might want you to participate with him.

Today “has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:34, NIV). You need all your wits about you for what is in front of you. Don’t add tomorrow’s burdens to an already full plate.

Response

1. What simple and clear mission can you see when your anxieties begin to swirl?
2. Go outside and look at God’s creation. Imagine you are walking with Jesus (because you are). What do you see and hear as you walk that speaks to your worries?

Day 28

Tomorrow

God promises that he is with you right now and that he will take care of your needs tomorrow. And God doesn't lie (Numbers 23:19). This gives you freedom to be engaged with what is most important in the moment. But the anxious mind can run to so many different places.

For example, even though you believe that God will take care of your needs, you also know that tomorrow could be very difficult. People will have died tomorrow. They will have heard that their spouse is leaving them. They will have learned that a child is an addict. Tomorrow is likely to be difficult—with challenges, frustrations, and annoyances.

It is hard work to live fully today. Human beings are natural prophets, always predicting the future. When our prophecies do not come to pass, we make a few more, undaunted by our poor prophetic record.

Here are some things that God promises for each day (including tomorrow):

You won't have to sin. You will receive grace to do what is right and good in whatever comes tomorrow. You won't have to run to an addiction. You can have self-control for your tongue. You won't have to enhance your reputation by boasting or putting others down..

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

This is more important than you might think. Relief from a threat *seems* like what is most important, but threats don't make us less human and more entangled by darkness. Sin is our greatest problem.

He will help you. When you speak to people of faith who have gone through what seem to be impossible hardships, they will often tell you that God did give them the grace they needed in their time of trouble. He helped them as they called for help.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)

Help does not always come in the way we expect. As a result, we too often miss the help we received. Sometimes it is that we have power to endure what we thought we could not. The promise is that you *will* receive help.

He will not leave you alone. You cannot hear this enough. You have the Spirit of Christ who gives you the presence of Jesus. The death of Christ was intended to bring you close to him—he was separated from the Father so you would never be separated. The right person, who loves you, who understands and has compassion for you, and who is quite strong—all our anxieties and fears are ultimately in search of him.

“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”(Matthew 28:20)

These were his last words before he ascended to his throne in heaven. Jesus is with you today, tomorrow, and forever. He is also ruling the whole universe and bringing all things together for God’s glory and your good. You can trust him with your tomorrows.

Response

1. Have you made a few false prophecies?
2. Do you believe that sin is your greatest threat? Talk about this with others.
Pray that you would see the dangers of sin more clearly.
3. What promise from the Bible is most helpful as you think about tomorrow?

Day 29

Death

Fears tend to cluster into three kinds: fear of not having enough money, fear of failure and rejection, and fear of death. The fear of death is the most formidable of these fears.

Here is where dictators derive their power. The one with the power of the sword wins, it would seem. So many fears find their way to death—fear of snakes, planes, elevators, crowds, bridges, driving in traffic. Panic attacks haunt us because we feel as though they bring us to death's door. Life, indeed, is very important to us.

The writer of Hebrews wrote about this fear—linking death to a larger consortium that included the devil.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14–15)

Though death is a formidable enemy, the apostle Paul showed how the death of Jesus Christ has radically changed this fear. “My desire is to depart and be with Christ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account” (Philippians 1:23–24). Paul welcomed death. Yet the sting of death persisted for him when he was shaken by the near death of a close friend (Philippians 2:27). Paul acknowledged that death, indeed, remains an enemy until Jesus returns (1 Corinthians 15:22–26). Expect some of your fears to be channeled toward the fear of death.

This fear can have a few different sources. One is a fear of the *way* you will die. Death sounds better if you could die in your sleep after a nice evening with family and friends, with a brain intact and a body free of significant pain. But Jesus did not die such a death, and we who follow him know that the odds are against it.

We can easily envision the worst possible death because we have most likely seen a few. In response, we remember that today has enough troubles of its own, and we live in the grace that the Lord liberally gives us today. Don't try to imagine a diagnosis of cancer. You do not yet have tomorrow's grace so your imagination will tell an incomplete story of the future. If you are going to venture out into the future, continue far enough out so that the story ends with you welcomed into heaven for an eternity of no more sorrow, tears, and fears (Revelation 21:4).

Response

1. Where does the fear of death show itself in your life?
2. Grace for today that fences off tomorrow—that is the skill we all need to grow in. How are you doing at staying in those boundaries? Which of God's words can you rely on when you are faced with the fear of death?

Day 50
Psalm 121

You are on a journey home. You had gone up to Jerusalem for one of the festivals. People were everywhere. The temple singers were in fine form. Scripture was read. Now you are walking home, which could take one to three days. You are with fellow travelers. You know all of them. Everyone is singing or reflecting on the mighty acts of God and his faithful deliverance of his people.

You see the mountains around Jerusalem and remember the God of Sinai who protected his wandering people in the desert. You feel compelled to say something. God is your help.

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth. (Psalm 121:1-2)

Another voice responds. Yes, the LORD will extend his help even to your sure-footedness on a rocky path. He will keep you—he will carefully watch over you like a hovering parent. And you can be sure that he never takes a break. Unlike all other gods who need their naps, the LORD is on watch even when you are asleep. How else could you get decent rest when you are in rough terrain known for wild animals and armed bandits?

He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep. (vv. 3-4)

Now another voice runs with the theme of the LORD's keeping and watching. The LORD is close by day, at your right hand, even shading you from the blazing sun. The LORD is close by night, when old myths about the dangers of the moon come to mind.

The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night. (vv. 5-6)

The final voice has heard the word *keep* and loves it. The word appears three times in the next short refrain. God is the Watchman. God is the Guardian. He will never let anyone snatch you from him. The evil of others

might touch you but not own you. Expect God's close watch to be his desire and delight, and he will do it forever.

The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore. (vv. 7-8)

The pilgrims are singing and speaking about Jesus. Everything in Scripture anticipated his coming. When he came, there were some who thought that he would lead military conquests and vanquish injustice. When he rose from the dead, his disciples expected that he would return and set up his kingdom within weeks. Neither of these came to pass.

But once the death and resurrection of Christ settled into the hearts of his disciples and they began to understand what had actually happened, they looked back on passages such as Psalm 121 and discovered that the language could not contain the enormity and beauty of what they had witnessed. This song had been fulfilled in Jesus in ways they could never have imagined. So they rejoiced.

Worries and fears would continue, but confidence in Jesus would take away their power. Our peace is founded on him and his unshakable kingdom.

Response

1. The pilgrims of Psalm 121 looked back on God's mighty acts as the reason to celebrate his watchful care. To what do you look back?
2. Psalm 121 is a conversation with different voices. How can your interest in God's words to your anxieties continue to draw others in? Anxiety will resist this. Its instincts are more solitary. But soldier on. Let others know what you are thinking about it. Invite them to speak of their fears and anxieties. Then you can grow as a community.
3. Do you have any psalms or hymns that have become a morning song for you?