

Sermon Series: The gift exchange

#1 Give God your worry and receive God's peace

Philippians 4:6-7

Meet Jesse. In Warrnambool Victoria he's a legend this Christmas because this carpenter by day has given up 2 hours of his evenings every night leading to Christmas for an unusual **gift exchange**.



In exchange for his time and skill to assemble complicated Christmas presents (bikes/playhouse/basketball rings, etc) for free before Christmas Day he asked his clients to give a donation to a local charity to help needy kids. What an extraordinary gift exchange!

"Boxing Day" was originally about gift exchanges of **unequal proportion**. cultures, 26 December is even known as "offering day". It originated as a holiday in the UK as a holiday for **giving gifts to the poor**.

Now Boxing day is a long way from what it used to be! In some countries¹ Dec. 26 is a **second Christmas Day!** In Melbourne it's "Recovery from bloated stomachs and sore heads Day", "Frenzied shopping Day", or "The Ashes!"



When a gift is given in unequal proportion to the one received it can be awkward. And we might feel even more awkward when we as God's children are **offered extraordinary gifts** of unequal proportion by God **each day!**



The Bible depicts Christians as children adopted into God's family; into an unshakeable, assured, covenant relationship of love. The 1st Letter of John says...

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! (1 Jn 3:1)

¹ such as Bulgaria, Catalonia, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Scandinavia

And Romans 5 tells Christians they have a solid relationship with God now, by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ; a relationship sealed by the gift of the Holy Spirit...

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

Any gift we give to God or receive from God is not to buy favour, it's a sign of our family status, by God's grace. As Philip Yancey puts it:

"There's nothing we can give God to make God love us more, and there's nothing we do to make God love us less" now that we are, by grace, adopted into God's family through faith in Jesus."

In addition, we realize that what we have to offer God as a gift seems so inadequate when compared to God's gifts – as C.S. Lewis once explained, even our greatest offering makes God "sixpence none the richer". That is, what we give God comes from God originally anyway! For God's children, any gift exchange is not about currying favour, it's an expression of a loving relationship already assured. And what extraordinary gifts God offers us daily as members of Jesus' family! What unequal proportions we experience in this gift exchange!

I'll take us through four such gift exchanges we read of in the Bible:

1. Give God your worry and receive God's peace
2. Give God your hurt and receive God's healing
3. Give God your grief and receive God's joy
4. Give God your life and receive God's new life

God welcomes even our ailments anxieties, and troubles **in exchange for** God's grace, peace, and healing and life.

Jesus made this clear in his teaching, saying:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Specific to our first topic in this series, we see that Jesus addressed the issue of worry in his “The Sermon on the Mount”...

“...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? 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? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ... (Matthew 6:25-27)

What sort of “worry” is Jesus talking about?

There is a difference between worry and caution. We *should* be wary of dangerous situations. For example, you should be cautious about the real threat of Coronavirus.² That is a completely rational and life-preserving thought process. There’s no sense in Matthew chapter 6 that Jesus is talking about **abandoning rational caution**.

Instead, in the original context, many people in 1st Century Roman society, a bit like us at Christmas, **fretted about every possible detail of their future lives**.³ Jesus noted that many **were ignorant of God’s goodness and daily care** and as a result, failed to live at peace, striving to control the future, not knowing God in **the present**. This is the difference between **worry** and godly **wisdom** for Jesus.

Let me be clear that I’m **not talking about** conditions of **clinical anxiety and depression**. Such complex responses to trauma or underlying medical conditions need professional care, supportive prayer and a loving community. If this kind of debilitating, unmanageable worry is your burden, please seek professional help and seek care from your church community too.

² Those who teach that “Jesus is my vaccine” abuse the meaning of Scripture

³³ Matthew 6:32

Instead, I'm pointing to what Jesus taught as **the kind of worry that we *can* avoid** with the help of His love and grace. He called us to consider giving over our worry to God. We can **give up** allowing our minds to dwell on and try to control the uncertainties of the future – matters that are largely out of our **control** anyway!

There are several flaws to this kind of worry that Jesus points out in his speech:

- Worry is unnatural – that is, see how nature doesn't worry
- Worry is unhelpful – it doesn't actually change any aspect of the future
- Worry is a sign of poor faith – if we knew more of God's goodness we would trust God more

Instead, Jesus offered a different path, saying...

Seek the [God's leadership in your life] above all else, and live by the peace and justice of God, and you will be given everything you need. "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." (Matthew 6:33-35)

The Apostle Paul took Jesus' teaching seriously in his own life and passed on some encouragement and practical instruction. He was no armchair critic where reason to worry about the future is concerned.⁴ In his *Letter to the Philippians* chapter 4 he gives **two steps** to giving God your worry in exchange for God's peace:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank God for all that has been done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can comprehend. God's peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in communion with Jesus Christ. (Phil. 4:6-7)

See the **two steps**?

1. Firstly, **tell God** about your worry – take it to God in prayer.
2. Secondly, **thank God** for what has already been done for you in Christ – thank God for who God is and what God already provides each day.

⁴ E.g. 2 Cor. 11:23-29

The inference in Jesus' teaching was to do this **daily**. Give God the gift of your worry about your life and receive God's peace that passes all understanding in exchange – every day!

Let God take charge of the program. Sit still for a moment and really take in the promise that God is present with you by God's Spirit. Lay it all out to God and open your heart for what is given in exchange. The practice of sitting quietly each day with the Scriptures open and being active in prayer is not a matter of complying with church culture – it's a really effective way to respond to Jesus' wise teaching! Philippians 4:7 seems to challenge us, saying: "You can dwell on your problems, or you can dwell on God's promises."

Paul says that the gift God will give in exchange for your worry is God's peace. Philippi was a Roman garrison town a long way from the Empire's imperial centre of power. But Paul's original readers would have commonly seen a Roman soldier, fully suited in military apparel, standing on a street corner. They symbolised a peace (the *Pax Romana*) already established in the past and assured today. Paul employed this image to encourage Christians about the peace with God Christ has established through His death for sins. He tells us, God will "guard your heart and your mind" with what the Gospel of Jesus promises you, every day.

So let me encourage you to give your worry to God and may you receive in exchange the peace of God which passes all understanding. May God keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of God's Son, Jesus Christ – this day and every day. AMEN.