We have worry rituals, don’t we? We bite our fingernails. We pace the floor. We lie awake at night. Our minds twist over and over around a problem, turning it this way and then that like a Rubik’s Cube. Let me show you.

This is a brand-new Rubik’s Cube. Right now, everything is in order. All the colors are grouped on their respective sides. I want to think this is how we were when we were little. Everything was good and worked well; nothing hurt or was wrong except for diapers (in the case of babies, of course) and the occasional snot.

But like this Rubik’s Cube, once life kept moving, things became complicated, mixed, and messed up, and we became chronically anxious people. So much so that though we may not use diapers as adults, we carry all kinds of baggage that “stink.”

This condition is an epidemic that no one is immune to it. You worry, I worry, our children will worry. But this is not a recent discovery or revelation. Jesus described the same condition two thousand years ago many times. On one occasion, he spoke to diagnose a woman with chronic worry. He said in Luke 10:41,

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, but few things are needed …”

The context of these words is when Jesus and his disciples unexpectedly showed up at Martha’s home, and she became so preoccupied with attending them, making sure they had dinner and a place to stay. But Jesus did not ask her to do anything as he said, “few things are needed…”

Jesus told Martha they did not need anything or were asking for anything. I can imagine how these words must have stopped Martha in her tracks. “Now wait a minute, Lord. I am just trying to serve you.” But the reality was that the trouble Martha was going through was of her own making. She was “worried and distracted by many things.” Instead of realizing that Jesus came to serve her, not to be served by her, her attention became obscured as she fixed her concerns on what she ought to be or do rather than on what Jesus was saying and offering her.

This is one of our greatest challenges in life, too: to pay attention to Jesus and worry less. We get consumed by the made-up expectations in our minds that we miss the blessings right before our eyes. And the terrible truth is that it becomes a habit, a way of life—not easy to let go of because we think that worry will help us be successful and appreciated. But what happens instead is that worry prevents us from leading the full lives God intends us to live. Instead of helping us solve life’s problems, worry creates new ones burying us deeper in despair. Makes us deaf to God’s voice. And like a domino effect, once worry takes hold of us, it keeps on going making our lives fall apart one piece at a time.

I know we can relate to this. Like I said last week, all of us are Marthas or Marthos. Worry is like a curse, a burden we all begin to carry at some point in our lives—some at a younger age than others. We get nothing out of it but an unnecessary burden.

The Book of Proverbs warns against this curse: “An anxious heart weights a person down.” (12:25) Jesus also highlighted this when he said, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (Matthew 6:27). It has been said that worry is like a rocking chair—it gives you something to do, but it doesn’t get you anywhere—it offers no benefits.

I recently read one interesting set of statistics on how worry renders no benefits. The findings indicate that there is nothing we can do about 70 percent of our worries. For example, of what we worry about, 40% are things that will never happen; 30% are about the past—which can’t be changed; 12% are about criticism by others, mostly untrue; 10% are about health, which gets worse with stress; and 8% are about real problems that can be solved. (“An Average Person’s Anxiety…” www.Bible.org)

Based on this, my conclusion is that when it comes down to it, worry is a waste of time and life. It is bad for us.

But it was not supposed to be like that. When God created us, the Bible says that we were good, meaning nothing was wrong (like a brand-new Rubik’s Cube), and there was no need to worry. We had everything we needed, and there was no sickness or death to be concerned about.

However, once Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate what they were told not to, from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they distrusted God’s goodness and, for the first time, experienced guilt, fear, and shame. Genesis 3:10 tells us they were afraid. Why? Because they saw themselves as apart from God. With the knowledge of good and evil, suddenly, they no longer saw themselves as children of God or felt safe under God’s protection; instead, they feared God’s presence. That is why they hid from God when God came looking for them.

So, all the way down from Adam and Eve, Martha, to you and me, we carry the burden of worry like a thick, heavy chain around our necks.

Now, you may be thinking, “But it is impossible not to worry! Can we truly worry less?” When Jesus told us not to worry, he wasn’t asking us to live in denial. He wasn’t telling us there was nothing to be concerned about. The truth is, our world is filled with struggles and real pain. We face legitimate concerns every day. Bad things do happen to bad people—and not-so-good people as well. Real problems occur. People don’t act the way they ought to. Relationships falter and sometimes fail. There is potential for pain all around us.

Jesus knew this better than anybody. He was constantly harassed and persecuted by his enemies. So why did he tell us not to worry? Jesus knew that a life filled with fear leaves little room for faith. Jesus warned us against worry because it allows problems and distress to come between God and us. Worry is the view that God has lost control or does not care, so we can’t trust him or wait on him anymore (remember Adam and Eve).

Think of it this way: a legitimate concern draws us closer to God, but worry pulls us from him. A concern looks to God for answers, but worry obsesses about problems and creates more.

Yet, even as pervasive worry may be, it is unnatural. God did not create us for worry. So what can we do about worry? How do we worry less, then?

The apostle Paul gives us concise and practical advice on what to do when worry strikes. He said in his letter to the Philippians, chapter 4:6-7,

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

His advice is to be anxious about nothing, prayerful about everything, and thankful for all things. How does this work? Let me give you a personal example. When my wife leaves for work, I worry she might be in an accident; or when my kids go on a field trip, I worry something might happen to them. So, if I take Paul’s advice and do what he says, instead of worrying about something happening to my wife or my kids, I should pray to Jesus, saying, “Jesus, be with Evelyn as she drives today,” and “Keep my children and everyone else safe while on the field trip.” This tiny act of praying changes my worry losing its grip on me. When I give my worries to Jesus, he breaks their bondage on me.

In the hymn, What A Friend We Have In Jesus, we find some profound words to encourage us to pray,

“What a Friend we have in Jesus,

All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit,

O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry

Everything to God in prayer!”

“O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!” Worry is not overcome by getting what we want but by having peace. Having what we want is not a sign that God is with us and cares for us; peace in every circumstance is the sign.

The apostle Paul knew this very well. When he wrote this letter to the Philippians, he was in jail and on death row. Still, he was not anxious but was praying, giving thanks to God even amid great concern. That is what gives peace. Even when something terrible may happen, we can trust that God will see us through and make everything right.

Can you see what happens when we listen to Jesus and follow Paul’s advice? While worry enlarges the problems, prayer and thanksgiving magnify God. When we are “thankful for all things,” we begin to see life as Jesus sees it, full of opportunities rather than obstacles. That is where peace comes from, from knowing we are loved, wanted, and looked over by God, as Paul noted, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Here is the good news: Jesus said in John 16:33, “In the world you face persecution, but take courage: I have conquered the world!” And in Matthew 28:20, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” This means that Jesus is fully aware of the challenges we face and the concerns we deal with. This also means that Jesus has the power and has given us the power to overcome. But the most important promise to keep in mind is that he said, “I am with you always.” If our faith is in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are never alone, abandoned, or not taken care of.

Because of our faith, we can trust that when life comes blustering, threatening to huff and puff and blow our house down, we can worry less because Jesus is with us. In him, we live in the mighty fortress of his love and grace, and the promise that he makes everything new (Revelations 21:1-5).

(\*Rubik Cube is “fixed,” as I say the last paragraph.)

So, I invite you today to come to find love and peace. As we start a new year, come find a perfect love that covers all your faults and concerns. Come find a faith that chases fear out the door. Come find peace for your soul as you realize how much you are loved.