

**Gathering Question:** If you were able to remove one major issue that causes you persistent concern, what would it be?

## Calling Out

The pressures that surround us every day of our lives have caught many of us in the web of one of the most troubling and menacing of sins: worry. Contrary to popular thought, worry is not an emotion; it is a choice. Worry is choosing to fret and strategize instead of entrusting an issue to God's care. Worry is wrestling with the bully called anxiety on your own rather than letting the Father fight your battles for you. The choice to worry creates unrest, prolongs uneasiness and, if left unchallenged, churns our waves of anxiety into a storm of emotions.

Prayer is the alternative to worry. As we open our hearts to God through prayer and lift up our joys and our burdens, release takes place. We learn to totally depend on God and trust him to take care of all our struggles and worries.

At its core, prayer is simply having a conversation with God. It more than two strangers chatting about the weather, it is a conversation between you and the sovereign Lord of the Universe. Prayer is fueled by the deep desire to know God better and intimately. It is a deep desire to know what he desires and to receive the blessings of a relationship with Him.

Prayer is not bargaining or pleading. It is not an attempt to extract from God the answers we desire. The Father will always act in our best interests, even if we never utter a word to him, but he wants to have a relationship with his children. No amount of pleading with God could make him more merciful and kind than he already is. We are simply invited to lay our concerns upon him, and to experience a blissful alternative to a life of worry.

All of us may have misused prayer occasionally. On one hand, we might have treated the Father like a vending machine or a stubborn employer rather than a loving heavenly Father who responds to us in love continually. We might have tried to take care of everything on our own, instead of asking God to help us make good choices and to take the right paths. We might have even prayed and then shirked our responsibility to be actively involved in providing a solution for the struggles of our lives.

God wants good things for all his sons and daughters. He wants to bless us but not at the expense of our holiness. He may decide to deny some of our requests if his refusal will pave the way for greater blessings in the future.

### **Read:**

Matthew 6:25-34; I John 5:14-15; II Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 4:4-8, 19

### **Reflect:**

1. In Matthew, what kinds of things would Jesus have us not worry about? What reasons does Jesus give for not worrying?
2. According to I John, will God give us everything we request? What are the limitations?
3. How did God provide for Paul despite the fact that he did not answer the prayer he prayed?
4. How is it possible to do what Paul tells Christians to do in Philippians 4?