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## Hello Summer

### Part 2 – The Thief of Anxiety

Clay Scroggins

**Ted Cunningham:** Clay Scroggins is the lead pastor at Northpoint Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia. For the last few years, I've had the opportunity to go there and do their married life events. I've become friends with Clay. We very much have the same DNA as far as church goes and how to lead in the church. He was here this week, so I asked if he would come and speak for us at Woodland Hills.

He wrote a book last year called *HOW TO LEAD WHEN YOU'RE NOT IN CHARGE*. How many here have a difficult boss. We've talked a lot about this at this church. Raise your hand if you have a difficult boss. He wrote this book for you. My book coming out next year is called *How to Lead When You Don't Want to Be in Charge*. That's my book. We'll see how well that goes. I encourage you to get on Amazon and pick up a copy of Clay's book, *HOW TO LEAD WHEN YOU'RE NOT IN CHARGE*.

We say two things around here often and we attribute it to Northpoint in Atlanta. One thing you will hear us say a lot it is "When you find yourself to be the most powerful person in the room, leverage your influence to help other people win." Something you hear even more than that around here is "Do for one what you can't do for all." We're grateful for the ministry of Northpoint, and grateful for Clay's leadership and how much it has influenced our church. This is his first time speaking in a castle, in a theme park and he's a little nervous about that, so would you please help give a nice warm Woodland Hills welcome to our friend, Clay Scroggins.

**Clay Scroggins:** That is awesome. I've noticed that sometimes, when you're in your every day life, you don't really know how good you have it because it's just your world. This is your world here in this theme park and maybe you don't even realize how good you have it, but I said this at 9:00 and I mean it. Getting to know Ted, over the last few years, has just been great and our church... We've had a few guest speakers in, but I don't know that we've ever had one that we have invited back as many times as we've invited Ted back. I say that because sometimes, somebody from the outside comes in and goes, "Oh my goodness, do you know how good you have it?" It takes that sometimes for us to realize it. I'm just telling you, from the outside looking in, you guys have an amazing church and an amazing pastor, and I just feel really grateful to get to be a part of it. Way to go! You guys are awesome!

I'm so grateful to be here. This is my second time to Branson and my wife and I love it; we've had a great time here. We've got little kids. We've got five kids. We've got nine, seven, five, three. Those are their ages, not their names. And then we have six-month-old, a little baby. The common thing people say when I say that is, "Oh my goodness! Do you know how that happens?" Or they say, "Are you Catholic? Are you Mormon?"

The answer to all that is we do know how it happens, we're not Catholic, we're not Mormon. Honestly, my wife can't keep her hands off me. It's a burden that I bear. I come home from a long day at work and I just want to talk. I just want to connect because I'm more than a body. I am a person with feelings and a soul. It's tough at my house. It is really difficult.

None of that is true. My wife is not here which is why I can say that. If she were here, she would be able to agree that it's definitely not true.

One of the things I want to talk about today is the fear that all of us live with, especially if you have kids. It's amazing how fearful we can be when we have kids. Some of you grew up in a generation where you never wore a seatbelt. You rode up on the dashboard of the car or you rode in the back of the station wagon without a seatbelt. You played on monkey bars. You rode bikes without helmets. You were living on the edge. Now, kids are eating dinner and we put helmets on them at the dinner table. What in the world are we thinking?

We're so fearful now. We live in a fearful generation. We live in a fearful society. Over the last couple of years, I've been thinking about how we can talk about this in the church. Of all people who shouldn't be fearful, it's us, but sometimes, for those of you who consider yourself a Christian, sometimes Christians can be more fearful than anyone else.

Today, I want to talk not just about fear, but I want to talk about fear's evil cousin. Before we get there, let me give you a definition of fear. Here's the one that I like most. Fear is an emotion caused by the belief of looming potential loss. Fear is this feeling I have... Usually, it's some sort of negative emotion and it's all future oriented. Most fears... In fact, I would probably say all fears are about the future. It's either loss of health, loss of finance, loss of relationship, loss of opportunity, something in the future, some looming loss. The way it usually shows up in our present is in this word right here, the word *anxiety*.

Today I want to talk about *The Thief of Anxiety*. That's the title that I've given to this message because anxiety really is a thief. Anxiety will rob us of life, honestly. I recognize that in a room like this, in a church like this, for some of you, anxiety is not a real issue. Maybe it's just a little low hum of anxiety that happens in the background of your life. Then there are others of you that anxiety is a real issue. It's the thing that maybe you would say, more than anything else, is causing problems in your life. Maybe you've never ever stopped to recognize it. Often times, anxiety just runs in the background of our life and we get used to it, we just carry it around.

Here's a working definition for anxiety. **"Anxiety is the present emotion..."** If fear is out in the future, anxiety is what I feel right now. It's usually a negative emotion. **"...of inner turmoil..."** Something on the inside is swirling or it's causing me to question things or it's causing me to be frustrated about things or easily bothered by things or I can just feel it going on inside of me and it's usually **"...produced by the uncertainty of the future."**

If fear is something out in the future I'm going to lose, anxiety is that thing that I feel right now. Here's the way I think about anxiety. I think about it like this brick right here.

Oops, wrong pocket. That made me nervous. I thought it was gone, but it's not; it's right here. Oh, my goodness. Anxiety is like this brick. We all have things that we're nervous about, things that we're worried about, things that we're anxious about, and we carry it around.

In fact, I believe that **anxiety is like computer**. A computer that has a software problem. It's got this virus that's keeping it from running at it's full speed. That's sometimes what anxiety is like. In the same way in our life, it keeps us from things and it slows us down. That's the problem with it. **It subtly slows us down and it quietly keeps us from operating at our full speed**. If I were to just walk around with this brick, I could handle it for about 60 seconds. At this point, I'm really ready to lay it down because it's a little heavier than I anticipated, it's starting to get a little weary and tiresome to carry this around.

In the church world, to talk about something like anxiety is not a real moment of pride, right? In fact, those of you that struggle with anxiety maybe you've never ever admitted it to anyone. You've never told anyone that that's something you struggle with because in the church world, what we often prescribe to people is "Just have more faith." "You should just believe God more." "What do you mean you're worried about things? You shouldn't be; you need..."

Has anyone ever told you, "You need to stop." That's the worst advice that anyone could give anyone who has a struggle with anxiety. "You should just stop." It's like if you have a sleeping problem and someone tells you, "Well just go to sleep." But you're like, "Well, that's the problem, moron, I can't." Anxiety is the same way. You can't just stop. Part of it is because you just carry it around. You've learned to operate with it. Just like a computer that operates with a virus, you've learned to just get along with it even though it's slowing you down and it subtly keeping you from life. It's keeping you from the kind of life God wants you to live. So, what do you do when you're just walking around with it?

I would say I have low grade anxiety. I'm married to a person... If my wife were here, she would say this. She struggles with anxiety; it's a part of her everyday life. She has to learn how to deal with it. In fact, I remember when we were first married, it was a Saturday, a lovely day. I woke up just really, really excited about whatever we were doing, whatever was going on. I could tell something was bothering her. I was like, "Hey babe, what's up. I can tell something is slowing you down, something is keeping you from living like you would want to live. What is it?"

She was like, "I feel anxious."

I was like, "Okay, tell me more. What are you anxious about?"

She said, "Well, that's just it. I don't have anything that I need to be anxious about and that's making me anxious."

Some of you that struggle with anxiety, you can relate to that. You go, "That's every day for me. When I don't have anything to be anxious about, that alone makes me anxious." Others of you that don't really struggle with anxiety, you think that makes no sense. Just enjoy the day. Just consider it a blessing that you don't have anything to be anxious about.

That day, my wife told me, “You now what? It’s the fact that I don’t have anything to be anxious about that’s making me anxious.” Some of you can relate to that because you’ve gotten so used to carrying anxiety around. You put it in a backpack because you don’t want to tell anybody about it. But you’ve got it on your shoulder and it’s getting heavy, it’s becoming tiresome, it’s giving you fatigue. If you knew how to lay it down, you would, but you just can’t.

Here’s the truth about anxiety. **Ultimately, anxiety hurts us, but helps no one.** You know this. The anxiety ultimately only hurts me, it only hurts you, and it doesn’t actually do anything, it doesn’t actually help anyone, but we don’t know what to do. If you had to say, – just speaking into our culture, our world – is our culture becoming less anxious or more anxious? I don’t think there is any doubt. In fact, I would imagine everyone would agree that our culture is becoming more and more prone to anxiety. In fact, I read two interesting things about anxiety.

I work with students a lot, so I’m very interested in the student generation. For those of you who are students and for those of you who have kids, you know this to be true. Working with teenagers, you recognize that there is more anxiety with teenagers today than there has ever been before. In fact, I read that the anxiety level of an average teenager in America today is the same as the anxiety level of a patient at a psychiatric hospital fifty years ago. Is that not crazy? Back then we would have said you need to be admitted and today we would just say that’s just normal. That’s just the normal thing that you’re living with.

America in general is just more of an anxious country. I read that when people moved to America, they’ve actually measured their anxiety levels. Just by moving to America alone and operating in our culture and our society, people’s anxiety level rises just by being here. You see, this is not a problem for everyone in the world, but there is something going on.

Today is not about diagnosing the problem. Today is about introducing a pathway to a solution. I recognize that if you struggle with crippling anxiety, if you struggle with deep depression, there really isn’t an answer today that could just fix you. I believe that. Sometimes pastors stand on a stage and try to prescribe you, “You just need to trust God more. You need to believe in Jesus more.” It feels almost non-empathetic. It feels almost silly to just say that there’s an easy answer today. There’s not and I recognize that.

What I hope today is that no matter who you are, no matter how deep it is, no matter how challenging it is for you, that you would at least get on a path today that could maybe be an introduction to a path that would lead you toward a more free life, toward a life that I really believe is possible for every single one of us, no matter how bad it is. I’ve heard this said about anxiety. I thought this was a fantastic quote. *“Anxiety is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere.”* – Jodi Picoult

The path of anxiety doesn’t lead anywhere. Today, I really believe that God has given us a way forward even in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America where anxiety is at an all time high. I believe there is a pathway to a better life, a pathway to a solution if you and I would choose to apply it.

In two places specifically in the New Testament, the authors spoke directly to anxiety. If you're a person of faith, if you're a Jesus follower, then I think this absolutely applies to you. The great news is if you're someone who is not sure about your faith, – maybe somebody invited you today and you're not even sure what you believe – I believe you can still try everything that these authors apply to us. They're actually going to give us the way faith and anxiety intersect. Here's what God would directly say to you and to me about our anxiety. What we're going to read comes from two authors.

One of author's name is Peter. Peter was one of Jesus closest followers. At the very end of Jesus' life when they came to arrest Jesus, does anybody remember what Peter did? Peter pulled out his sword and chopped off a guy's ear. That does not sound like an anxious person. But, Peter was on the run the rest of his life. There was always a threat of persecution. He ended up giving his life for what he believed.

The apostle Paul, who we are going to read the second thing from, was a follower of Jesus later on in his life. Paul, in the same way as Peter, was always on the run. He knew a lot about what it meant to be anxious, worried, fearful in this life.

Here's what Peter said. **5 All of you...** Which in Greek means all of you. How many semesters, Ted, of Greek did you do? None for you. I did five, which is about worth none for me. All of you, though, literally means in his day, he's just speaking to everyone. He's saying this is an all skate, this applies to everyone; all of us can believe this.

Now, he's writing specifically to a group of people, but we believe we can still apply this today. ...**clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because...** Now, for those of you that have been paying attention, you go, "Wait a second. Didn't you say anxiety, not humility? I thought we were talking about anxiety, not humility. How does humility have anything to do with anxiety?" That's what I thought the first time I read this. I thought it was interesting because he's going to speak specifically to anxiety in a couple of verses, but he begins with humility. Why is that? It doesn't seem like they have anything in common. Here's why. He's going to explain that there is a very real relationship between humility and anxiety.

What is humility? Humility is not just thinking about yourself less. Tim Keller, a pastor in New York says and C.S. Lewis said this as well, "Humility is not thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less." It's both things. **Humility is properly thinking about yourself in view of God.** It's understanding who God is and who I am, and what our relationship is. Peter would be a person who would believe that God owns it all. He has it all. He applied for the position of God and had every qualification, meaning he knew everything, he had all the power. He's the supreme being in all the universe. When you understand that and then you understand yourself in context with him, being able to do that rightly is where humility begins. I don't own it all. I don't have all the gifts needed to be God. That's the beginning of humility.

**"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."** God literally sets himself up against proud people. Now all of us have a bit of pride in us, right? Has Lee Greenwood rolled through Branson lately? I'm sure he has, right? Is Lee Greenwood here today. I love the song, "I'm Proud to be an American."

What a fantastically patriotic song. In fact, being an American carries with it a sense of pride that all of us have. Some of it is okay. Some of it is fine to have pride like that. If you feel proud of the work you've done or proud of the kids you have or proud to live in this country. There's a healthy sense of pride and then there's an unhealthy sense of pride. In the unhealthy sense of pride, we actually set ourselves up against God and all of his might and all of his strength. That doesn't seem like a smart thing to do. So, Peter says don't do that. God opposes proud people, but he comes alongside humble people.

Now, what does humility have to do with anxiety? I think a lot of us are carrying things that we were not meant to carry. A lot of anxiety is rooted in the fact that we think we have to. We think we can control, we think we can figure it out and make it happen. And because of that, if somebody were to say to you, "Why don't you just put it down?" We would say, "Well, it's irresponsible to put it down. I've got to handle this. I've got to handle my health and my finances and my kids and my aging parents and the relationships in front of me. I've got to control them." In fact, I believe pride says... If pride could speak, pride would say, "I've got this."

Have any of you ever tried to move something that you had no business moving? When I was in college, I had to move a piano. I had this old man that was smoking this cigarette... I'll never forget it because he could talk, and the cigarette stayed in his mouth the whole time. It was an amazing skill. He stood over on the side and he did not help me and my friend when we were moving this piano. He just stood over on the side and said, "Don't let it beat cha!" That's all he said over and over again. It was like a sound track. I remember thinking, *Yeah, don't let this piano beat cha. We've got to handle this thing.* Well, two men of less than average strength were not meant to be able to carry or move a piano. But as guys, in our machoness, we go, "No, no, I've got it." All of us, I believe, are carrying things where our tendency is to go, "I got this." Maybe your job right now. Maybe your thinking, *I've got this.* The future of your health, the future of your kids, the future of your family, whatever it may be, all of us are tempted to go, "I've got this."

Humility says, "I know I can't." And it's not a sign of weakness; it is wisdom to be able to say, "If the bottom falls out of the economy, I don't know what I'll do." It's wisdom to say, "If I got the diagnosis, I don't know what I would do." "If my kids, God forbid, ended up making whatever decision they wanted to make, I don't know what I would do." I can't control them. I can't control my parents. I can't control my job. I can do all that I am meant to do, but I can't control that. It's fantastic to be responsible and to carry what you were meant to carry, but it's silly to think that you're meant to control your life. You can't. And humility says, "I recognize that I can't." Pride says, "I got it."

Peter goes on to say something that's quite profound. I want you to look at this next verse in 1 Peter 5. So, if you believe God sets himself up against the proud, but he comes up next to the humble, He says, ***6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*** What I want to encourage you with today is that if you were to figure out a better way to handle your anxiety, literally the relief and the release that you would feel would feel like a lift. My hope, my prayer is that you would walk out of here today feeling more of a sense of a lift, not because you begin to levitate, but because you let go of what's so heavy that you weren't meant to carry, and you allow God's strength to be a lift to you. He says that when you humble yourself under his mighty hand, you will feel lifted up.

Now, it might not happen today, and it might not happen tomorrow, he says it will happen in due time. "Due time" is a difficult thing because we are the same group of people that will heat up a Hot Pocket for dinner for 90 seconds and then not be able to wait until it cools off and we burn our mouth on the same thing that we were rushing to get to. It's unbelievable. You see, due time in Peter's mind must have been that it might not be at the end of the day, it might not be at the end of the week, it might not be at the end of the month, but there will come a time when relief and release will happen that will feel like a lift, as we begin to let go of the things that we were not meant to carry.

Here's specifically what he says, ***Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*** Cast, meaning to throw. He says take your anxiety and throw it on to him because he cares for you. I don't know when you read that... "God cares for me. What does that mean? I mean, I get it, God loves us. It's on bumper stickers, but sometimes little clichés like that are Hallmark Card clichés, they lose their meaning. It's like saying I'm lefthanded or Subway has \$5.00 foot longs. It's like I get it. I've heard it before, but what does it really mean?" Here's the picture that I want to give you. You've thought of this before, but I hope that you would never forget this image when you think about God caring for you.

Matt, can you help me... When I say help me with this, can you come and just move it out here. Travis, thank you. Travis and I are look alike. We just learned that today. We have tried our whole lives to never be in the same place at the same time until this moment today. Thanks so much, guys.

To me, this is the greatest picture of God caring for us (the cross). This was an instrument of Roman execution. This was an instrument of death. This is the way men and women were killed in the City of Rome, in the Providence of Rome, under their sovereignty. Jesus, in love and in kindness, took on beatings, took on humiliation, took on shame, took on embarrassment, put on a crown of thorns, allowed himself to be mocked, and then allowed himself to be hung on a cross, nails driven into his wrists and into his feet. Why? It's because he cares for you, because he loves you.

When Peter said, "I want you to cast your cares, cast your burdens, cast your anxiety on him because he cares for you," he wasn't just speaking like he was writing a greeting card. No, for him, this was real. He had denied Jesus three different times. And for him, when he finally saw Jesus after Jesus had been crucified, I'm sure he thought he was going to get a stern talking to. But Jesus just loved him, Jesus just wrapped him up in his kindness and his embrace and said, "Peter, I love you. Go feed my sheep."

Some of you don't deserve this kind of love. You have made crazy, terrible, immoral decisions and if God's love for you was dependent on your behavior or my behavior, we would have excluded ourselves, but Jesus hung on a cross, knowing that you would deny his love, knowing that you would turn your back on his love, and he loves you anyway. And because he cares for you, Peter says, "I want you to take your burdens, take your anxiety, and I want you to literally cast it on him.

Peter said, "You can cast your anxiety on him and it will hold. He is strong enough to hold. The problem with most of us is that most of us are carrying things we were never meant to carry. In fact, I believe anxiety stems from carrying something that you were not meant to carry. You weren't meant to carry the burden of the future. You weren't meant to carry the burden of whether or not it's going to work out.

If you got that health diagnosis that you fear, you wouldn't be able to handle it anyway. So, why not take your anxiety and cast it on him because he wants to carry it for you and I believe he can carry it for you. In fact, because God cares, you can cast your anxiety on him. Because he cares for you, you can cast it on him.

For the last few minutes, I want to try to give you, as practical as I can, how you actually do this. This is not something that is intuitive to us. What's intuitive to us is for us to carry our own stuff, but after we read what Peter wrote, I think it's helpful to couple it with what Paul wrote about anxiety because Paul specifically gives us instruction on it. What Paul is going to tell us is that casting your anxiety on him, by turning your anxiety into prayer, is the way to do it. You actually take your anxiety, and through the vehicle of prayer, you throw it into prayer and cast it onto the cross. You cast it on him, and prayer is the way that we do that.

Paul says this in Philippians 4. ***6 Do not be anxious about anything...*** I'm sure some of you that struggle with anxiety are like, "Paul, that is the most stupid thing you could ever say. Don't be anxious about anything? Easy for you to say, bro. You probably have JV worries; I've got varsity worries." Paul lived his whole life under threat of dying. He was locked up in prison, then would get free, then would get locked up again. He was stoned. He had every reason in the world to be worried about his life, but for him, he just knew there's nothing in this life that could take away what you have in Jesus, so don't worry about anything.

Don't be anxious about anything and then he tells us how. ***...but in every situation, by prayer and petition...*** He says the way you do it is you take your fear, you take your worry, you take your anxiety, and you throw it onto him. You actually name it in prayer. Have you ever tried actually naming your anxiety? Some of you have and the person sitting next to you... That's what's difficult. The person that makes you most anxious maybe is with you. Maybe it is a person or maybe it's a thing or maybe it's something that might happen in the future, but it is so powerful to say, "Father, what I am anxious about is this... And then name it, say it.

You know how when you fly? Do any of you like flying? Some of you that don't like flying are like, "Okay, these are the crazy people that I should not befriend." Do any of you hate flying? A lot of you hate flying. It's amazing how anxiety and flying are best of friends. Most people who are anxious struggle with flying. That's a real fear. For those of you that hate flying, you know the speech that the flight attendant gives you right up front. Some of you that love flying, you've never listened because you're just looking out the window going, "This is amazing! We're going to be sitting in a chair in the air; this is so awesome I can't wait!" You've never listened to a word that person says.

But for others of you that actually are fearful of flying, you could quote the attendant word for word because you know exactly what they say. That's because you think every flight you're on is the last one. You're like, "This is it; we're going down. This is the last flight we're all taking." Have you ever looked around a plane and thought *this looks like a good group to go down?* I've thought that before. I've looked around thinking, *This seems like the kind of plane that would go down. There are some seedy looking people here. I could see this happening right now.*

One of the things they say is if there are some severe turbulence, the oxygen mask will drop. Then they say make sure you put it on and they say if it's not working, what should you do? They say just quit and run around screaming like you're crazy, right? No. They say don't give up on it; keep going with it. You've got to keep breathing even if the bag doesn't immediately inflate, it is working, but you have to trust the process. That's the way prayer works. Prayer often times feels like it's not working, but you can't give up on it too early. You've got to trust the process. Even if the bag doesn't inflate, don't give up on it.

Paul says, don't be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving...** This is the second thing. He says not only is prayer given to us as a gift to envelop our anxiety, but you've got to couple anxiety with thanksgiving.

I've got a friend named Wendy who I work with and who is a cancer survivor. She's about two years clean and she's doing great. I asked her the other day when I was thinking about this topic, "Wendy, I would imagine for somebody who has had cancer, one of the worst fears you have is that cancer will return."

She said, "Every day. I think about it every single day."

I said, "What do you do? How do you fight that? How does that not just cripple you?"

She said, "I have to think about it in the present, what am I grateful for now?" This is amazing. What gratitude does is it snaps us back to the present. Her fear is all about what will happen in the future. What if it returns? But gratitude snaps us back into now. What do I have right now. She said, "I've got two kids that are healthy. I can be grateful for that right now. I've got a husband that loves me. I can be grateful for that right now. That gratitude snaps me back into the now." I think that's such a fantastic picture.

Paul says in every situation, through prayer and petition, and with gratitude, allow that to snap you back into the present. He says, **...present your requests to God.** You cast your anxiety onto him. And then he gives us the payoff. Some of you know what's coming next. This verse is the most beautiful hope filled promise that God could give us. **7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding...** It doesn't even make sense. It's unfathomable. **...will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** It actually acts as a guard.

Are any of you basketball fans? We just watched the Warriors win the finals. It's amazing that they beat LeBron because I just thought any team that has LeBron is amazing. In fact, the coach of the Cavaliers, I always look at him and I think he must be a wonderful guy, but what an easy job to coach LeBron. If I were the coach to the Cavaliers, I'd just be like, "Hey, just do whatever LeBron says. Here's the good news. If you don't do what he says, he'll still just throw it off the backboard and just dunk it himself on top of the rest of the team."

Anyway, the team that drives me crazy the most is in college. The Duke Blue Devils. I hate Duke. I have a brother-in-law who loves Duke, and I don't know why. I just hate Duke, but I have a lot of respect for Duke because they play such intense defense.

Do you remember when Duke came on the scene in the early 90s? They had Christian Laettner and Grant Hill. They had this little scrappy point guard named Bobby Hurley. Bobby Hurley was known for playing... He wasn't the biggest of guys, but he played the most intense defense. Do you remember what he would do? When he would get in the defensive stance? He'd pick up guys half court, maybe full court and then what would he do to the ground? Do you remember? He would slap the ground. It was like his way of going "Let's go!" I don't know if it would be intimidating or not because he a pretty small guy, but it was an intimidating thing for him to do. Some of you are like, *Are we in sports camp right now?*

Anyway, I just want to show you this because I think this is a great picture. Bobby Hurley would pick people up and then he'd slap the ground. It was as if he was ready to say, "Hey, let's go! I know the offense is trying to be aggressive and score, but on defense, we're going to be aggressive." And he's on his toes, he's not on his heels, he's on his toes because he's about to guard the basket. "I'm going to keep you from getting there."

When I read this verse, I thought of that same image that peace is such a powerful emotion that when we allow our anxiety to be thrown into our prayer, God allows his peace to rise up and guard our heart. It's like peace slaps the ground and goes "Let's go!" You're not getting to this heart. I'm guarding this heart." That's what God's peace wants to do for you. He wants to allow his peace to guard your heart. If you've ever experienced this, you know this is one of the greatest reasons why you should put your faith in Jesus. It is mysterious, it is mystical, you can't explain it, and it is one of the greatest aspects of life when God's peace rises up and combats your anxiety, fights anxiety by guarding your heart. That's what God wants to do in Jesus name for you. And it's possible, no matter how bad the anxiety is, but it begins when you take your anxiety and you cast it onto the cross, when you literally throw it onto him.

The problem is we're carrying things we were not meant to carry, and Jesus tells us, "I'm willing and I'm able. You can trust me." So, here's the question for all of us. Will you try to carry your fears? Will you continue to try to carry your anxiety? Or, will you be willing to cast them onto the one who cares for you? Would you be willing to take your fear, your anxiety and throw it onto the cross?

Here's the beauty of the cross. The beauty of the cross is it stands as a picture that God is willing to carry us. He's willing to carry you. He's willing to carry all of your fears and all of your anxieties, but just because he's willing to, does it mean that he's able to? I'm willing to try and protect my family, but my fear is that I'm not able to, which is why I allow my wife to sleep closer to the door. She's scrappy and my hope is she'll be able to fend them off and I'll be able to, I don't know, somehow get my Kung Fu moves ready to be able to protect our family. But my fear is not that I'm willing, I know I'm willing; I would give my life for my family. My fear is am I able to?

Jesus allows the cross to stand at the center of time, letting everyone know "I am willing to carry your burden." But he's not just willing. The empty grave reminds us that he's able to carry us. There is an

empty grave that reminds us that Jesus defeated death. He looked death square in the eye and said, "No, not today. Not ever." In his defeat of death, he makes a promise that there is nothing that can overcome you in this life, not just because he's willing to, but because he's able to. He's powerful enough. He's big enough. He's strong enough. And he loves you enough to be able to carry whatever it is that you don't want to carry.

So, I just want to ask you today. Would you be willing to throw your cares, your worries, your concerns, your anxiety onto him? He's not going to fix it today, but over time, you're going to find that as you begin to throw your fear onto him, his peace will begin to rise up and it will become a life source for you and he's willing to and he's able to. The question is will you? You can keep carrying it on your own. You weren't meant to, but you can. Eventually, it will rob you of life. Or, I would love to invite you today, maybe for the first time ever, to take what's making you afraid and throw it onto him.

I'd love to close us in prayer and then we're going to sing a song and as we do that, I just want to invite you to hold your hands out as a sign of submission, as a way to say to your Father in heaven, "I can and I'm open to you taking this from me and carrying what I wasn't meant to carry." So, I'd love it if you would close your eyes, bow your head. I want to pray for us. I'd love for you to pray with me as I do.

Maybe even hold your hands open and say, "Father, I've been carrying this for far too long. I've been carrying the outcome of my health, the outcome of my job, the threat of the loss of our finances. I don't know what to do. At the end of the day, God, if it were up to me, I would mess it up, so I'm asking you would you allow me to get rid of this burden? Would you be willing to take it out of my hands, God? I don't even know if I have the energy to throw it. I need you to take it from me. God, I trust that you're strong enough. I know that you love me enough, but I'm trusting that you're strong enough to be able to carry it."

Father, I thank you that you're willing to, but your able to. That means so much to us. God, I pray right now for every person listening, whether they're in the Chapel or watching online. If they are carrying something they weren't meant to carry, maybe today, for the first time ever, for the first time in a long time, you would allow them to experience the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.

God, there is some serious stuff in all of us that we've been trying to handle on our own and we were not meant to. We know we're not able to, but you say to us, "Cast your anxiety onto me because I care for you." So, Father, we just thank you. We ask you to carry the very thing that we're not meant to carry, in your love and in your kindness. We need you. We need your peace. We need your strength. We thank you for Jesus. Thank you for the cross. Thank you for the empty grave. We pray all of this in his name, amen.