

We are in week three of our series called Hoosiers. And throughout the month of June, we are going to hear from some of my favorite Indiana preachers, men who have shaped my own faith through their teaching, but more importantly, through their lives and through their friendship. And today's Hoosier preacher is a man who probably needs no introduction. For many of us, Tom Ellsworth served as the lead minister of Sherwood Oaks for 40 years before retiring in 2020. During that time, God used Tom and Elsie to grow this into a strong and healthy church family.

And so it's fitting that on Father's Day, Tom would be the one to share with us, because for many of us, he's like a spiritual father. Tom's influence on Sherwood Oaks and Bloomington, his impact for the kingdom of God, it cannot be overstated. But the thing that I love most about Tom is that throughout his ministry, and still today, Tom led with character and integrity. He loved and he served our church family so well. And through all of the highs and lows, Tom never lost his sense of joy, because that joy was anchored in the Lord.

I love this man, and I know many of you do as well. And so would you please give a warm Sherwood Oaks welcome to Tom Ellsworth?

Thank you. That is so kind. And I can tell you it is a joy to be back with you, to see a lot of familiar faces and to see faces I don't know, which tells me the church is doing what the church ought to be doing, continuing to grow and to expand. Let me begin with a word of thanks. I just want to say thank you to you for your support through prayer and some finances over these last four years, since.

Nearly four years, since we retired and sort of retooled into a new phase of ministry. Those prayers and that encouragement mean more to me than I can tell you. And I'm doing a lot of different things. But near and dear to my heart is this ministry of working with Bob Russell and encouraging ministers. I get to do some coaching and some mentoring along the way.

But when Bob and I, we do seven of these weeks a year where ministers come from all over the country, some even from out of the country, and we do a retreat for them to help encourage them. And can I ask for your prayers for these guys? I know you don't know their names, you don't know where they're serving, but I can tell you they are hurting. I think sometimes we forget in a place like Sherwood oaks just that this is pretty unique. And the rest of the church world out there isn't as sometimes fortunate or as blessed with the joy.

And some guys, especially those guys who don't have staff, they serve alone. The congregation maybe runs 50 to 100. They hurt, and they're hurting all the time. And I had one guy recently tell me, he said, I don't not only have no wind in my sails, he said, I don't even have any sails anymore. So that tells you some of these guys are really hurting.

So pray for them. Keep these churches, because the bulk of our churches are in those smaller categories. I remember well some of the struggles that we had when we were

running 80 back in the early days. And these guys need your encouragement. So thank you for helping us do that.

And then, dads, happy Father's day to you. I hope you have a wonderful day celebrating with your family. And by the way, this is the day to tell dad jokes. The family has to laugh. This is part of the rules of Father's day.

Tell a dad's joke, you get a laugh. And in case you missed the video when you were coming in, I got one for you when the kids get up from downstairs. Why are spiders so smart? Because they can find anything on the web.

Yeah, okay, I get it. It's a dad joke. All right, it's Father's day. Ladies, don't tune me out, because it's Father's day. This is not a Father's day sermon.

It is a sermon for everybody on Father's day. When Shawn invited me to preach this morning, which I'm grateful for, he said, preach your favorite sermon. I thought, I've already preached my favorite sermons here, both of them. So today. So today I'm going to preach from my favorite book, or at least one of my favorite books in the New Testament, the Book of Philippians.

So if you have Philippians, if you have your scriptures with you, turn over to Philippians, chapter four. If you got your phone or your tablet, whatever you're using for scripture this morning, turn it there in chapter four. Just hold that. We'll get there eventually. This morning in the World Happiness report, the nordic populations, which would include Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, they consistently rank as the happiest people in the world.

Now, I don't get that. Hawaii, some tropical island paradise. Yeah, I get that. The greek isles, where people live a long time, I can understand that one, too. But the nordic peoples, it's dark up there.

It's cold up there. You spend a lot of time indoors up there. How can they be the happiest people in the world? Well, once you understand how it's ranked, you can understand it better. The questions are two, what are your expectations in life?

Followed by what is your reality in life? And on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest, you rank your expectations and then your reality. And it appears that the nordic people don't expect much out of life, and so their reality and their expectation is pretty much the same. Thus they are concluded as the happiest people. But I don't think that's a really great way of analyzing joy in life.

So let me ask you, as a Christian this morning, what are your life expectations compared to your life's reality? Would you say your life is generally joyful, or are you stressed, fearful,

worried? Well, you say, should we be worried? I mean, don't we have a right to be worried? I mean, look at the mess our world is in.

There's wars and rumors of wars, rising anti semitism, the embrace of moral relativism, rising costs and lack of confidence in our economy. While the list is endless, we ought to be worried. We ought to be stressed, really. I read one lady who sent out an email to her best friend. She said, start worrying now.

I'll send details later. Does that describe you? It just doesn't take much to set you off, and you're just there in worried and anxiety land immediately. Now, that said, I think some details would be in order here. Did you know that our word worry actually comes from the old english word, which means to strangle?

It's a pretty interesting concept, isn't it? And that's exactly what worry does to us. A recent World Health Organization study revealed that the global presence of worry, anxiety and depression has risen 25% since 2020. That's what Covid kicked off. Other studies show or disclose, that many have experienced a radical downturn in their attitude and a soaring level of worry.

Anxiety is now the number one issue for women and the number two issue for men. In a recent survey of high school students, persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness rose from what used to be 26% to 44%, the highest level of sadness ever recorded among high school students. And tragically, suicide has become the second leading cause of death in those in ages ten to 24. Worry, stress, fear, anxiety are taking their toll on our culture. And with all of our sophisticated technology, smartphones, smart tablets, smart tvs, we still seem powerless to help the most important source of our intelligence, our mind.

You see, while social media and 24 hours news can be a contributing factor to our stress, it's not the cause of it. You can turn off your tv, you can turn off your phone, you can turn off your tablet, but you can't turn off your mind. Did you ever wake up in the morning with a song going through your head, you know, and all of a sudden, you start humming that song and you try to get it out of your mind, and you can. It just keeps coming back, back and back. And sometimes it's a song you don't even like, and it just keeps going over and over and over.

Kind of frustrating, isn't it? That's exactly what worry, stress, and fear will do. It pummels our brain, and we just simply can't get our thoughts out. It strangles our common sense. We shake our heads as if we tried to get it out of our brains, but it doesn't work.

The worries and the stress and the fears and the anxiety, it's just locked in there. Elizabeth Jeffries, who teaches a session during Bob and my's time of refreshing weeks, reminds the guys who are there, the ministers who are there, that we all have two little almond shaped parts of our brain, sort of in the center of the brain called the amygdala. And nestled in this

middle of the brain, the amygdala plays a key role in processing our emotions, folks, and our reactions, our memories, and our decision making associated with fear, worry, anxiety, and stress. For instance, if you meet somebody and this person reminds you of your aunt Clara, that you never really liked your amygdala, kick in and say, you're not gonna like this person. She's like, Aunt Clara.

That's what your amygdala does. It causes us to react in ways that sometimes probably aren't the best. So we gotta find a way to make sure the amygdala doesn't hijack our emotions, and that stress, fear, worry, and anxiety don't dominate our lives, because if we don't worry and fear will do just that, they'll dominate. Our anxiety will fuel pessimism. We will fret and stew over things we can't change, that we wish we could change, but we are stressed because we can't change them.

The American Institute on Stress gives us this observation. There are numerous emotional and physical disorders that have been linked to stress, including depression, anxiety, heart attack, stroke, hypertension, immune system disorders, and a host of viral linked illnesses. In addition, stress can have direct effects on the skin, rashes, hives, dermatitis, the gastrointestinal system, and can contribute to insomnia and degenerative neurological disorders like Parkinson's disease. In fact, it's hard to think of any disease in which stress cannot play an aggravating role or any part of the body that is not affected. So when we talk about worry, stress and anxiety, we're not talking about stuff that's just for play.

This is dangerous stuff we're dealing with. And most of our worries and fears are, well, really kind of unrealistic and unfounded. Take a look at these three pictures up here. Which one strikes the most fear into you? Anybody?

Sure. Yeah. Do you know that there are six people every year that die from a shark attack?

There are 200 people every year killed by elephants. There are 2 million people that die every year from mosquitoes. Sometimes our fears just aren't well placed. They're not just real realistic. And what's more, no two people deal with stress in the same way.

Some people sleep a lot more. Others can't sleep at all. Some stop eating. Some just gorge. They go on a feeding frenzy.

Some quietly withdraw. Others lash out in anger. Some sit and do nothing. Others become just incredibly active. Now, that's important for family members to remember, because no two people respond the same way, especially husbands and wives.

If you're both stressed about the same thing but your spouse doesn't demonstrate it like you do, you conclude sometimes they aren't reacting to it, they're not worried, and then we get angry with one another. Will you please realize that everybody deals with it in a different way? And then realize this, too, that like a rubber band constantly stretched beyond its capacity, losing its elasticity, an individual stressed with worry and fear will lose his or her

mental emotional elasticity or stability. When you're being stretched too far and too much, you'll crack. And let me add this.

Some people deal with anxiety, panic attacks, and depression that result from a chemical imbalance in their body or some kind of genetic predisposition. If that's you, and if you're dealing with stuff that you're trying to get rid of and you can't seem to go to your doctor, let your doctor help you, because sometimes there's a medication that you can get, and you say, well, I'll be able to handle this myself, but most of the time we can't. So taking a medication to get you through that time from a trusted professional is a good thing.

I think the great physician himself would be pleased if you sought out every possible solution and you say, but I can handle this myself, can't I? No, I don't think you can. In general, you know, we think we're. We ought to be strong enough to deal with anything that comes along. But do you realize what we're up against?

Ephesians 6:12 says, for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. You don't want to fight these battles alone. Satan is out to destroy our lives. Worry and fear are two of his most well worn tools. So what do we do to get a handle on our fears and our stress and our anxiety?

Well, we need to replace our illegitimate fears and worries with a sense of joy. Renowned Bible scholar Howard Hendricks had a great response when asking the question, how are you? Anytime somebody would say, well, okay, under the circumstances, he'd respond, well, what are you doing under there?

So let me ask you, if you're one of those people that says, well, under the circumstances, I'm okay. What are you letting circumstances dominate your life? Shouldn't something else, more than circumstances be guarding your mind? Yeah, I want us to go to Philippians. We're there now, okay?

So open up your scriptures. And here's the irony of the book of Philippians. Its basis is joy. All right? And it's so ironic because Paul wrote this book, this letter to the church at Philippi while he was incarcerated in the Mamertine prison in Rome.

A horrible place, the last place you would go to find a sense of joy. And why was he there? Simply because he was preaching the gospel of Christ. It's a powerful passage. Oh, and by the way, retail giant Amazon, they keep track of what people underline in their e readers, like a Kindle or something like that.

And when you highlight something, they know what it is. And they released a report on the most frequently highlighted book, and I was encouraged to know that it's the scriptures. The Bible is the most frequently highlighted book on e readers. What's more, do you know

what the most highlighted verse is? It's not the one that rusty read for us this morning, which you would think John 316 and 317.

It's Philippians four, six, seven, most frequently highlighted verse. According to Amazon. You're going to hear it because we're going to read from verses four through nine and watch verses six and seven. When you come to rejoice in the Lord always again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.

The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication. With thanksgiving. Let your request be made known to God and the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence, and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things, the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.

Practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. All right, let's do some mining in this passage. For just a few minutes. Let me bring out a couple thoughts that you can take home with you this morning. First one is, don't be anxious.

Be anxious for nothing. Paul says, don't be anxious. Don't worry. Be happy, as the old song said it. Now see if you can guess the problem.

It affects 70 million Americans and is faulted for 38,000 deaths every year. It costs the us 70 billion annually in the loss of productivity. The most severe cases occur between the ages of 30 and 40. The condition impacts more than 50% of the population 65 and older. And treatments involve everything from drugs and herbal medicine to machines.

Know what the problem is or what the condition is? Insomnia. Insomnia. Americans can't sleep. I know what you're thinking.

Well, just give them a sermon CD that'll serve everything or solve everything. Well, it would help. I guarantee you it would help. But contrary to popular belief, insomnia is often the result of the worry, stress and fear that we have going through our minds. It is not easy to let go of.

And sometimes when we lay down at night, it just races through our minds because everything around us is so quiet. Now, I don't want this to sound too simplistic this morning. This is not easy to do. It is right. There is a simple answer, but it is not easy to do.

I'll be honest. I struggle with worry. And I struggle with stress. I know I shouldn't, but I do. And what I've learned through all these years is that it never helps.

You know the things I get stressed about when it's all said and done, it doesn't help. The things I worried about when all was said and done, it never helped. So take these words to heart. When you are worrying, think about what Paul wrote in Philippians. You say, well, what if my child comes down with a serious illness?

Shouldn't I worry? There's a difference between worry and being concerned. First of all, okay, every one of us would be concerned. But worry doesn't help the situation. Spend time productively.

Spend time in prayer, seeking some medical help. And the the value of trusted friends. Well, what if I lose my job? Is worrying about it gonna help? Get out and beat the bushes.

Get your name out there and pray for God's direction. Well, what if my marriage is falling apart? Well, be concerned, but don't worry about it. Get some professional help. Get some counseling.

Follow what scripture says on creating a positive home. And you say, wow. Is worry really all that bad? Yeah. Andre Peterson writes this.

She says, repetitive dysfunctional thinking is therefore a sign of spiritual laziness. I would suggest that worry tops the list of dysfunctional thinking and spiritual laziness. You see, in worry, we just waste all kinds of time. What if we tried working at our problems instead of worrying about our problems? What if we trusted the almighty instead of churning with anxiety?

You say, how can I do that? Well, a little bit farther down, in chapter four and verse 13, Paul writes this, I can do everything through Christ, who strengthens me or who gives me strength. A better translation might be, Christ gives me the strength to face anything. It's not so much I can do anything. This is more the point.

I can handle anything. I can cope with anything. I can deal with anything. I can make it through anything. I can survive anything if I have Jesus Christ.

When we worry, it is an insulting act of sin that says God can't be trusted to take care of me. That's really what worry says. I can't trust God to take care of it. I got to worry this out. I got to work it out myself.

And I'm stressed because I can't handle this, but neither can God. Do you believe that? I certainly don't. I think God can handle what we've got going on in our lives. When's the last time you really looked at an egg?

When you took it out of the refrigerator? Maybe this morning when you fixed dad a breakfast. Since it was Father's day. Do you realize what a marvel that hen's egg is? There

are approximately 10,000 tiny little holes to allow oxygen to enter and carbon dioxide to exit.

The shell, however, is coated with a substance called bloom, which keeps dust and bacteria from getting into the egg through the shell. The egg white is not only a source of protein for the chick inside, it also serves as a shock absorber, if that that egg gets turned over and back and forth. A few days before the chick emerges from the egg, a special tool called an egg tooth grows on the tip of its beak to enable it to break through the shell from the inside. A day before, the chick swallows the entire yolk, which provides three days of food and water. And right before that chick begins his exit, he punctures an air sack in the egg that provides him 6 hours of oxygen.

What an incredible support system. Now, I'm here to tell you this morning, if God can enable a tiny chick to develop in and then escape from such an elaborately designed capsule of life, then what in the world do you have that God can't handle? What are you worried about that God is too small to deal with in your life? Let God be God. Stop applying for his job and just do yours and quit your worrying.

Sermon is for me first, you second. Here's the other thing I want you to remember. You know, don't be anxious. Stop your worrying or change your attitude. That's the second part.

Now, if you're thinking that attitude can't be all that helpful, think again. I like what Warren Wearsby wrote. He said, outlook determines outcome. Attitude impacts our action. You want a positive outcome?

Then change your outlook. You say, how can I do that? Well, Paul spells it out here again, this is going to take some time, but the first thing is practice rejoicing. Paul says, rejoice. Do you realize that the word for joy in its various forms and tenses, is used 16 times in these four simple chapters?

Theologian Karl Barthes, surveying the command to rejoice in Philipians, finds three imperatives. Three times it's commanded, 218 be glad and rejoice. Three, one. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. Four, four.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say it, rejoice. From the forceful nature of these three commands. Barthes says that joy in Paul's letter is a defiant nevertheless, you got tough times. Nevertheless, rejoice.

You got a conflict with somebody you can't seem to resolve. Nevertheless, rejoice. You're feeling tired and weary in your faith. Nevertheless, rejoice. I like what Kent Hughes adds to this.

He writes, the apostles words allow for no loopholes, always permits no exceptions, regardless of how humiliating or painful things might be. Why is this so important? Because

you won't find joy in what's wrong with your life. Count your blessings, not your burdens. You won't find joy in being selfish.

Selfishness destroys relationships and opportunities. You won't find joy in trying to keep up with your neighbors. Unfair comparisons will eat away at you and drive you nuts. And you won't find contentment and you won't find joy in your regrets. Don't spend your time wasted on what might have been.

Spend your focus on what might be. There is no joy in a regret, regrets make poor companions in the winter of your lives. So spend your time rejoicing, not regretting, and find something every day that helps you rejoice. You say, well, I don't feel like rejoicing. Well, do it anyway.

And you say, well, no, that's hypocritical. No, that's obedience. Remember, this is a command. Rejoice in the Lord, always. So practice rejoicing and then act positively.

It has been said the happiest people don't necessarily have the best of everything, they just make the best of everything. Think about the contrast between your trials and your joys. We've been through trials, you've been through trials. But honestly, can you say that your trials have been worse than your joys have been great? On the days you're having a hard time, sit down and just make a list of all the joys, all the good things, all the positives that have come out of your life.

And then start acting the way you wish you felt. And you'll eventually feel the way you act. Act positively, and thirdly, guard your thinking. Now go back to verse eight. I want you to look at this carefully.

Think about it carefully. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Six. Thought patterns as a substitute for worry, stress, fear and anxiety. Truth.

Truth anchors our soul and keeps us from deceit. That which is noble. Moral excellence. Dignity with life. That which is just.

That which is right, not wrong, or evil. That which is pure, which is morally good, not despicable. It celebrates innocence. That which is lovely. Focus on the attractive, the winsome things of this world, not the smutty things of this world.

Admirable, which means commendable, high character, uncompromised integrity. And then Paul adds this thought. He says, if anything is excellent, think on these things. And the word excellent here means that which exceeds our expectations, and we are right back to the world happiness report. What are your expectations in life?

I'm going to tell you. In Christ, we will exceed our expectations, not because everything will go right in life, but because he is right with us in everything we face. I am amazed how God structured the brain. In his book, this is your brain. On Joy, Doctor Earl Hinsland describes how joy and anxiety travel the very same pathway in the brain.

You got that? Joy and worry travel the same pathway in the brain. But here's the interesting part. There is not enough room for both to simultaneously occupy the path. So when you're worried, Joy can't get through, but when you're focused on joy, worry can't get through.

You open the gate to one or the other. The choice is yours. It's not circumstances, it's your mind. You make the control. Which one is going to occupy that path?

Let me see if I can illustrate that passage, both the passage and the principle. This way. This morning, let's say that this vase right here is your mind. And let's say that these ping pong balls represent different fears, anxieties, stresses and worries. Maybe there's a little bit of green envy going on with you this morning.

Maybe you're angry and the redness just flares up all the time. Maybe you're feeling just a little blue with life. But all these thoughts pummel our minds. They fill our minds. They get lodged in our minds until our mind is so completely full that we can't find any way of getting rid of them.

But Paul says, whatever is true, whatever is lovely. Let's say this picture represents those things in verse eight. So we're going to pour these into our mind. So whatever is true and whatever is pure and whatever is lovely and whatever is of good report. And you say, well, nothing's happening.

Well, that's right. Nothing's happening yet. Because this isn't an overnight thing. You can't just say, I think I'm going to be joyful tomorrow, and that's going to solve everything. No, it takes time.

You're going to practice rejoicing, right? So you just keep pouring day in and day out. You don't give up. You don't stop, you don't quit. And as the water fills the vase, as the joy, as the loveliness, as the hopefulness begins to fill, the other worries just continue to pop out, because both can't be there at the same time.

I'll tell you what I want. I want the things of Christ to dominate my mind. Let go of the worry, the stress and the anxiety. In Christ, you can face anything. Let me pray with you.

Father in heaven, we thank you for this day, and we thank you for the joy that we have in Christ. Lord, help us to focus on those things that are true and lovely, pure, admirable, noble, to be involved in what is excellent and praiseworthy so that your spirit, your joy, might fill our lives. Bless this congregation, Lord, to continue to be a light in the darkness. Help them, Father, to make everything new in Christ. In Jesus name we pray.

Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church did you know? You can watch all of our video content, both current and past, on our YouTube channel? Visit [YouTube.com sherwoodoaks](https://www.youtube.com/sherwoodoaks) to watch messages, series and complete worship services.