

**Week #1 of the 2-Week Series, "ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING"**

**REJOICE AND REQUEST**

**Feb. 16, 2020**

**Rev. Richard Maraj**

**Rev. Richard Maraj:** So, how many people here have ever felt anxiety? Anybody ever felt anxious? Anybody ever have, like, an important conversation that you were dreading? Or test results? Or uncertainty about your relationship or finances, and you had anxiety for days? Even weeks? Anybody ever have? How many people ever had something on your mind that was disturbing you and bothering you, and you couldn't get it out of your mind? And how many would admit that you're a bit of a worrier and you're a lot more stressed and worried than you'd like to be?

According to the National Institute for Mental Health, levels of anxiety, fear and depression are the highest they've ever been in our country's history. It is actually the number one mental health issue among women, and number two mental health issue for men (next to alcohol and drug abuse). So high an impact does it play in our culture that over \$300 billion is spent in all various ways of treating and lack of productivity. Just in medications, alone, for depression and the various ranges, between 1997 and 2004 more than doubled from \$900 million to \$2.1 billion.

People are reporting feeling more anxious and stressed, including college students, high school students, employees, employers. People are feeling more stressed than ever. The United States, according to the National Institute for Mental Health, is the most anxious country in the world! Does that surprise you a little bit?

The thing about it is: we live in the most powerful country in the world. We live in the greatest country in the world, the richest country in the world. This is a time to be alive where technology helps us live longer and have a greater quality of life. Technology gives us more conveniences and access to information and connecting with people. I mean, all kinds of stuff than we have ever had! And yet, studies show we are the most anxious, the most stressed, and among the least happy... not in the top 1-of countries where people self-report themselves to be happy.

And I find that surprising: that many people live in a constant state of anxiety. Everybody has some anxiety. Everybody has some worry and fret. But it is at an amazing level. And the question is: Why? Why – in a country with so many things – why would we be less happy and more stressed?

Sometimes I think it's our cultural belief that more is better, bigger is better, busy is better. That we're constantly going, going, going, going, going and feeling that stress. And much is culturally and individually self-inflicted. We often get distracted by the next best thing that's going to make our life better. Always scattered and running to the next thing to improve our lives.

Another one is our idea of happiness. We have this limited idea that happiness is this and everything else is not. "If I don't get THAT, then I'm not happy." I would say the definition I use of happy – that is our collective definition of happy – is, "Everything goes my way."

**[Congregation laughs]**

I don't know about you, but...

And the last one is that we're really externally-focused. We let the outer conditions – we think if all these would be in a row, then I'll be happy. We live life way more in the outside than on the inside. And the unfortunate... And I'm not even mentioning stuff like concerns about terrorism, concerns about cancer – I mean, we could list a lot that'll create more anxiety, so we won't go there. But it does create us living in more of a state of anxiousness and fear and worry and doubt than we really need to. We have habitually gotten into that state of being tense and stressed a lot.

Let me give you an example. Everyone take a deep breath and just relax. Take another deep, calming breath and just let go. Another deep breath and relax your shoulders. One more deep breath and just relax your neck. Relax your whole body. Just relax. And so, my question for you is: How many people feel a little bit more relaxed now? So, my question is: Why were you tense on a Sunday morning, sitting in church?

***[Congregation laughs]***

Could you think of a safer place to relax? This is how habitually stressed we are – so tense we are, so on edge we are – being anxious and worried all of the time.

I remember the first time someone lead a Unity meditation and they said, *“Take a deep breath.”* I'm thinking, *“I know how to breathe, man. Why are you giving me instructions on how to breathe?”* But then, even to this day, when I do it – even when I say, *“Take a deep breath,”* – it reminds me that I breathe shallow a lot. We all do! And breath and fear are actually related. We relax more the deeper we breathe. We're actually more alive and engaged when we breathe deeper.

Here's what the Bible says about anxiety. It says numerous things, and here's one of them: *“Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down.”* Over and over it says there are so many negative repercussions of us hurting ourselves, diminishing the quality of our lives, and our enjoyment of life by living in constant anxiety. And really you know what the key is? The key is our mind. Because in the same mind – in the same room – our mind could have a peaceful mind or anxious mind. It depends what's going on in our mind.

Our minds are powerful and they're great gifts, but it could hurt us or help us. It could affirm or undermine. It could be our best friend or our worst enemy. I'm sure we've all had a time where our minds were just driving us crazy. The mind is a powerful thing! We can do all kinds of things to our mind. I don't think we know our skills or have trained how to use our mind as effectively. There are all kinds of things you can do to our mind. We have all kinds of options.

Let me give you some:

You can open your mind. You can close your mind. You can change your mind. You can lose your mind. You can blow your mind. And you can even boggle your mind.

***[Congregation laughs]***

Now please keep in mind, things can cross our mind. And if you have the presence of mind to bear in mind the truth that out of sight means out of mind. Now if you don't mind, I have half a mind to give someone a piece of mind...

***[Congregation laughs]***

... because a lot of things have been weighing on my mind. And that will take a load off of my mind. Now you're thinking I probably have a one-track mind or a dirty mind or I'm playing mind game, and I ought to mind my own business. But, I want to say in my own defense, I am of sound mind.

***[Congregation laughs]***

It's just my frame of mind brings these things to mind, and I want you to keep in mind that you are always on my mind.

***[Congregation and Rev. Maraj laugh]***

Never mind.

***[Congregation laughs]***

So, here's the thing, the mind is a powerful thing, but what are we putting into it? Because, again, it's the same mind that can have a peaceful mind and the same mind can also be an anxious mind, depending on what we're doing.

You know, the Apostle Paul once said, *"Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* He's saying: don't be conformed by buying into all these things and appearances and conditions, and buy into all these ideas of who I should be, and what happiness should look like. But be transformed: change your mind, transform your life and how you feel by renewing your mind. And that means to refocus your mind: to use your mind in a more positive way.

Because what happens is – and the reason he said it is because he knows our mind gets distracted and needs a lot of refocusing – we obsess about things. We think things over and over again and again. That's why they say 90% of what we think today, we thought yesterday!

***[Congregation laughs]***

We are creatures of habit... and a constant state of anxiety can actually become a habit by not training and controlling and utilizing and refocusing the mind in a greater and better way.

The reality is, we're not meant to live lives of dread and trepidation. We're not meant to live lives of angst and constant uncertainty and fear of the future, or constantly be worried. Jesus said, *"In this life there'll be trials and tribulations."* Yeah, there's going to be some tough stuff. But he also said, *"Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world."* Be of good cheer! Because through your spirit... And there are spiritual laws and tools to use that we can transform ourselves. We can renew our minds in great ways. Jesus said he came that we may have life and have it more abundantly. We are meant to have more joyful, more happy, more abundant lives. And we've been given the tools, but we don't always know how to use the tools.

**And so today, we're going to learn how to renew our mind from an anxious mind to a peaceful mind so that we will be anxious about nothing.**

The scripture I want to focus on is Philippians 4:6-7. Here's what it says: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known*

*to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds.”*

**So, we’re going to look at these four things: it says prayer, supplication, thanksgiving and making your requests known to God.**

**So, let’s start with prayer.** Why is prayer important for an anxious mind? Because a mind that’s busy, prayer actually relaxes and quiets the mind. Prayer is a time of resting your mind in the mind of God and peace comes. The calmer and quieter the mind is, the more peace we have.

You know prayer is a unifying activity. When we pray, it’s usually because we’re scattered and all over the place. Prayer calms, centers and unifies our mind with the mind of God. Remember when Jesus said, *“Come to me all who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest.”* And the rest comes in time of prayer, in time of quietness.

And then the second thing that’s powerful and important about prayer and its impact: it relaxes and quiets the mind and simultaneously turns our attention away from the problem to a higher source – to a higher place. We can get lost in the problem quickly, but prayer not only quiets the mind, but it turns it away from that condition to something better: to the highest power, to a higher consciousness, a higher perspective, a higher awareness.

Let’s go to one of my favorites, and that is the miracle of the loaves and fishes: the feeding of the 5,000. The first things Jesus told them: to sit down, which is about relaxing, quieting the mind. And the second one: it said he looked up. He took what bread they had and looked up. Meaning, he chose to not look at the condition – the problem – but to look to a higher perspective and a higher place.

You remember when Einstein said, *“You can’t solve the problem at the same level it was created.”*? That you need a higher perspective. That’s why, when things are feeling panicky and we’re anxious in our lives, it’s important to meditate and quiet the mind, and look to a higher perspective. Because that, alone, will begin to calm us and bring us a sense of peace.

Listen to these Scriptures and how similar they are: *“The Lord is near; do not be anxious about anything.” “The Lord is at hand; have no anxiety.” “The Lord is with me wherever I go; I will not be afraid.”* And finally: *“It is in God that we live and move and have our very being.”*

Every one of those says that God is right here, right around us. We live in God all the time! And yet, how often do we feel so distant and disconnected from God? So lost in mind with what the problem – the anxiety – is that, even though God is at hand and all around us, we don’t feel or acknowledge that connection.

I believe the real source of anxiety is that we’re disconnected from our Source. Because when we’re disconnected from our Source in here **[points to heart]**. Disconnected – that’s when we let the negative thoughts entertain us and draw us in, consume us. So the more we’re centered, the more relaxed, the more we’re aware. We’re more at peace. And it takes us away from focusing on whatever we’re anxious about.

That’s prayer. **The second thing is supplication.** Supplication is asking or begging, but with humility. You know – with earnestness and sincerity. You know, the thing that actually increases anxiety is the less control we feel. If we’re in a situation, and life feels out of our control, guess what? Anxiety goes up. And

the more anxiety goes up, the more we want to be in control. And the more control goes up, the more anxiety we feel. And it's quite the cycle! Quite the unhealthy cycle.

So, the thing about supplication that I want to focus on is the part about the humility, the earnestness. There's almost like a softening. And it's a surrendering of our need to be in control in the moment. That takes us to another, deeper level. To soften and surrender our need to be in control, because that is what begins to open up a deeper level of awareness, a deeper level of peace.

And you know what allows us to soften, to surrender and to let go? It has to have a foundation of trust. If you don't trust that letting go will be okay – if you don't trust there's a Presence, an Energy and a Source that loves us and has something better for us than this – then the softening and surrendering of control actually becomes harder to relinquish. But the more we spend time in prayer, the more we can trust and soften and let go, and open ourselves to more.

Listen to these wonderful words from Jeremiah: *“Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when the heat comes; its leaves are always green. It doesn't worry or be anxious in a year of drought, and it never fails to bear fruit.”* So, what it's saying is: when you trust, you can soften and surrender, and your roots will be watered and your leaves will be green and you will bear fruit. That, regardless of the conditions – the heat or the drought – things will go well. But you have to soften! There has to be that humility. There has to be that letting go and relinquishing of control to allow Spirit to move through your life in a greater way.

Anxiety disappears very quickly when there is anchoring and trust that helps soften us, surrendering control.

Everyone take a deep breath now. And I want you to make yourself soften. Deep breath, and just relax. And what's it feel like to just soften? Soften your heart. Soften your mind. Just soften your outlook. Another deep breath, and get to a place of trust where it's okay in this moment to just surrender control of your life. Can you let go and soften enough to just let go? And relinquish the need to control whatever you're worried about right now? And just let God lead you and guide you to something greater? One more deep breath. Soften and surrender takes us to another level that brings peace and releases anxiety. Amen.

**The next one we're going to move to is thanksgiving.** Most of think that thanksgiving is a level of appreciating and giving thanks for what we have – gratitude – and that's a beautiful thing. But I think it is more – it is a lot more – than we realize. When it says, *“In all things give thanks, for this is God's will for you,”* to me, what's been coming to me, is that thanksgiving is not just a recognition and acknowledgement and appreciation of what we have. Thanksgiving is also a rejoicing and a celebrating, and a using and enjoying, and a sharing of what we have.

Because sometimes when we're anxious, you know what happens? We pull back from life. And when we pull back from life, you can still say, *“Yeah, I'm grateful because I've got all these good things,”* but you're not feeling it. Because what happens is: when we're anxious, you know what we do? We pull back from life. We withdraw. To give thanks for life means be engaged in your life. To not step back; step in to those areas we've disconnected from ourselves. We step back from our families or step back from living the kind of life we want, because we're struggling so much. We need to step back in.

So, to give thanks for your life is to be fully engaged in your life. Live, feel, rejoice, enjoy, share and give!

In that thing with the bread [loaves and fishes], you know, easily in a situation of lack, you could say, “*Let’s hoard this just for us*” or “*Let’s not give; let’s ration.*” What did Jesus do with that? He broke it. He gave it, and shared it. So, in moments of anxiety, don’t pull back. Don’t hoard. Don’t get scared about it. Use it! Enjoy it and still keep living your life. That’s what “*In all things give thanks*” means. In all things, LIVE. In all things, be engaged in your life. Feel, enjoy, share, celebrate still! And, yes; it’s a human tendency – when life isn’t going well – to shut down and to pull back, to not feel, to not risk.

This week, I laughed my butt off with my friend. And I haven’t laughed that hard in a long time. And this week, I cried deeply for a long time. This week, I was moved by the kindness of somebody who doesn’t even know me that well. This week I was touched and reminded of the people who love me and care about me. This was a tough week. And this was a great week. And the only thing I can say about myself is: I feel happy that I stayed engaged. Because it’s easy to want to run; it’s easy to want to hide from yourself when life isn’t going as great. But to truly give thanks for the life we have is to live it all the time and to not shy away, but to step in.

So, where in your life have you pulled back a bit? Where in your life have you stepped back because you’re hurt or you’re anxious or scared? What we need to do as best as we can – at least in one or two of the areas – is to step back in. Is to live, is to use, is to give and share. And that’s what I think it means; to be thankful is to actually engage and live your life, even when it isn’t perfect.

**The final thing that helps us with anxiety is to make your requests known to God.** Think about it: when we’re anxious, we’re afraid of all these things that will happen. But to make your requests known to God means to switch the mind from a fearful place to a creative place: a place of possibility. To begin to look at your life and use your mind to say: what is it that my heart desires? What is it that I want to create that may not be happening right here and now, but how can I use my mind in a way to open more channels of good, even if my life isn’t expressing as fully as I want?

To use the mind in a more creative, joyful way of thinking, expressing – coming up with what it is we want our lives to look like – is a powerful, important thing. Call it vision, intention, affirming, claiming – whatever you’d like. It is the using of our mind to activate and attract and clarify what it is we want our lives to look like.

You know, I saw a thing that says that a windshield is meant to be much larger than the rearview mirror, because what is ahead of us is more important than what was in our past. And it is our vision that can help us see past our worries, and use our mind, our imagination to think of possibilities.

So, what is it that you desire currently? What is a desire that you have for your health? For your relationship? For your finances? For your career? Write it down. Get it alive and percolating, even when the evidence isn’t there at the moment.

I saw *The Graham Norton Show* – it was on some Facebook thing – and they had Jim Carrey. I’ve told this story since the first time I’ve heard him tell the story, and that was when he was broke and a comedian in a move from Canada and a move in LA. And he’s doing alright, but he was hungry a lot – not doing so good. Instead of feeling down and feeling anxious, he would drive to town and look at one of the theater

marquees and pretend his name was up there: anything, starring Jim Carrey. And he wrote himself a check for \$10 million. And I've heard him say – one year later – he signed a deal for \$10 million for *Dumb and Dumber*.

**[Congregation laughs]**

And I would say that was smart and smarter.

**[Congregation laughs]**

And he was so funny, in his typical Jim Carrey way, he says, *"I'm a manifester! I believe this stuff!"* And he does!

But again, in those moments, he could have been down. He used his mind as a creative tool – a tool of possibility, a tool of opening channels of good – instead of using it to just regurgitate what isn't working and what he didn't like.

Question: sometimes people ask is: So how specific should I get? I'll give you the answer after I read this.

**[Congregation laughs]**

In the book of Genesis, here's this cool thing. So, Abraham sends his servant to the village to find a son for his son, Isaac. And so, this is the servant's prayer when he gets to the village on behalf of Abraham for the task and it says:

*"Lord, God of my master, Abraham, make me successful today. And show kindness to my master Abraham. See I'm standing here at the spring and the daughters of the townspeople are coming to draw water. May it be when I say to a young woman, 'Please put down your jar that I may drink,' and then she says, 'Drink and I will water your camels, too.' Let her be the one that you have chosen for your servant, Isaac, and by this I will know you have shown kindness to my master."*

We should all have a servant just like THAT!

**[Congregation laughs]**

But, look how specific: I'm standing by this bush, I'm going to ask her this question, let her reply by wanting to water my camels, and that's how I'll know! So, it's quite specific. And I don't think it always needs to be that specific, but there's nothing wrong with that.

Imagine it with Jesus and the loaves and fish: if he was like: *"Lord, I want some sourdough and smoked salmon."*

**[Congregation laughs]**

I mean, he could have gotten specific. *"How about some garlic bread and tilapia?"* But he didn't. He just opened a space.

And so, here's the answer – specific or general: it's whatever your heart says. If your heart's saying specific, then get specific. But always open the space to allow God to bring it maybe in a better form. But if that's what your heart's calling, say it. And if your heart just thinks, *"I would like for the highest and best in this situation, my relationship, my finance, career,"* then say it. The most important thing is

what's sincere in your heart. *"Make known to God the request"* really is about what's going on in your heart. And if your heart's feeling it, then you're putting out the best energy. Just because someone says it should be detailed, don't make up details. *"I want it Tuesday, I want a red car ..."* No; do what feels right in your heart. But always sincerely give it to God.

Anxiety is a serious, serious issue. We all feel it all the time. We're human beings; our minds tend to go to things that aren't always positive. We tend to get stuck in them over and over again. The good news is that we have spiritual tools to renew and transform our minds. And they're there available for every single one of us! Yes, our minds get distracted, but we can always keep bringing them back.

And here are the four tools:

**Remember to turn to God in prayer and rest your mind in the mind of God.** It will automatically take you away from the thing you're worrying about.

**Secondly is supplication.** Soften and surrender your need for control, trusting that God's got something better for you. And the more you let go, the more you soften, the more Spirit can bless you.

**The third thing is thanksgiving.** Thanksgiving is about rejoicing in your life. Don't step back; step in! Be fully engaged in your life – even in the parts that aren't going well. Find the parts that are going well and engage in those.

**And finally, make your request known.** Whatever your heart's saying, let your mind be creative with possibilities. Open new channels. Think of new paths. Think of things you'd love to have and say, *"Why not?!?"* Why not write yourself a check that's what you feel like? Why not see your name in lights? Because that's how powerful the mind is.

If we do this, I guarantee you, it will calm our minds down, we'll be more spiritually centered, more happy and alive, and we will be anxious for nothing.

God bless you all!

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