

## How to Win Over Worry

February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016

In the years leading up to World War I, Karl & Julie Bonhoeffer lived a wealthy, aristocrat's life with servants and governesses to wait on their every need.

- But when the war broke out, their lives were changed forever as **their oldest two sons** were conscripted into the German army.
- Because of the economic collapse and massive shortages in Germany, the Bonhoeffers **were forced to send their 11-year old son, Dietrich, to scout for food** each day out on the streets.
- Life was getting harder and harder. But when they heard about their son Walter getting killed on the battlefield... they were devastated.

After the war, still wrestling over the death of his older brother, Dietrich chose to study theology.

- At the age of 16, he could see how the political unrest in Germany was **stirring his nation back toward the fierce nationalism** that led to WWI... and was deeply concerned.
- Clearly, the **anger most Germans felt over the conditions dictated by the Treaty of Versailles**,
- as well as the **depression destroying their country**, continued to open doors for the growing Nazi Party.

And yet, while his peers were rallying toward Hitler, Bonhoeffer saw the writing on the wall...

- especially **as the staunchly anti-Semitic rhetoric** showed itself more tangibly on Germany's Jewish population.
- And so, in spite of **ongoing threats against him and warnings to stop**, Dietrich Bonhoeffer continued to speak & act out against the Nazi party.

It was in this context that he preached his first sermon as a seminary graduate... a **message based on Psalm 121**.

- I'd like to read the words of this Psalm to you. And, as I do, I'd like you to **think of a young man living in tumultuous world...**
- Wanting to instill hope in his parishioners, who were, in fact,

facing the grim reality of another devastating war, **Bonhoeffer** began his message with these words from the Psalmist:

*"I lift my eyes up to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil—He will watch over your life (soul); the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore."*

It's easy to dismiss words like these as coming from someone who didn't really understand how hard life can really get.

- And yet, Bonhoeffer was **hounded, persecuted** and **imprisoned...**
- for **leading an underground seminary** for ministers who wouldn't align themselves with the Nazis...
- And for **organizing rescue operations** to save Jews.

Just **23 days** before the Nazis surrendered to the Allied Forces, On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945, **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** was hanged in the **Flossenburg concentration camp**.

- He lived and died with Jesus NOT because he was a hero... but **simply because he was gripped by the reality** of this Christ, who demanded his entire obedience...
- and who, in turn, **gave his life** the kind of **meaning** and **purpose**, that death itself could never take away.

Bonhoeffer proved to be one of the most brilliant thinkers of the 20th century... a man who **sacrificed everything to stand with Christ**, in the midst of a Nazi controlled Germany.

- And he did it with amazing strength and humility... *but not because he was convinced* that his circumstances would all turn out okay....
- But because **He knew where his help came from**. He knew who was watching over him.

Truth is, **these words from Psalm 121** had a huge impact on me back in the early 90s while Joyce and I were living in Tajikistan.

- As I've told you, the country was in an all-out civil war, which not only tens of thousands dead, but displaced over 600g others throughout the country.
- At one point, things were getting particularly bad. **Eleven foreign workers were taken hostage** with threats of more hostage-taking reaching us every day...
- threats the UN were telling us were very serious if not immanent.

The leading commander of one of the main Islamic opposition groups, **Rahmon "Gitler"**, had asked a few people about me, which raised some additional concern (see pic).

- One couple from France had already been killed... with another friend of mine who experienced mock-executions.
- Military checkpoints littered the streets, which were off limits after dark.
- Things were so bad that most of the embassies, including the US Embassy, was bugging out.

I remember being outside one evening in Dushanbe during that time, well after the city curfew... looking at the beautiful mountains that surrounded the city.

- **And almost immediately, this verse from Psalm 121 came to mind.** I had an overwhelming sense of peace.
- Believe me... I wasn't endowed with any particular courage. **I just had His peace...** knowing, **as that passage says**, that the Maker of heaven & earth was with us.

I was reminded of all of this while in Armenia this past week staring out at Mr. Ararat each morning from my apartment window.

- While driving to the Khor Virap monastery about 35 minutes from Yerevan, I had to stop. Again, I just **stared at Mt. Ararat.**
- "I lift my eyes up to the mountains, where does my help come from?"

When I arrived at Khor Virap, which means “Deep pit”, I thought about St. Gregory who was thrown into a 20’ pit for 13 years **after having come to Armenia to preach the Gospel** in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

- When the king who put him there was felt he was going mad, he **called on Gregory who healed him and set him free** from his pain.
- Because of that, the king gave his life to Jesus and established Armenia as the first Christian nation in the world, in 301ad.
- As I **stared at Mt. Ararat standing so tall** beyond Khor Virap, again, I thought of Psalm 121.

It’s one of those passages that always reminds me of who Jesus is... as our **Creator, Sustainer, our anchor... our helper and protector.**

- There are times, though, where the challenges and stresses and uncertainties of this life grow bigger than our understanding of just how BIG Jesus is.
- And it’s then that we start to wonder where our help is going to come from... that **maybe Jesus isn’t big enough.**
- And when that happens... worry often begins to take root in our lives.

The reality is that so many people around us today... so many of us... are **living lives under a heavy cloud of worry:**

- Worry, particularly over the future... **worry that you won’t know what to do** when you get to the future...
- Worry that **you wont have what you need** in the future...
- Worry that **you’ll be hurt by something or someone** in the future...
- Worry that **you’ll be left alone** in the future.

And, **over time, those worries left to fester inside of us** can birth a sense of hopelessness in our lives...

- that **can open the door for fear and depression**, both of which can leave us feeling so paralyzed.
- And so, against the background of this passage in Psalm 121, I’d like to focus on how we can **win over worry in our everyday lives.**

But let me first say that **the goal of this message** isn't to offer some formula of **using God as a means of attaining a worry-free life.**

- Following God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength is **not a means of anxiety-avoidance.**
- It doesn't ensure an easier life... but rather, it ensures His best life for you... a life of rich meaning and significance.

I do hope, of course that, like it was for Bonhoeffer, this passage will **remind you of just how big of an anchor Jesus is** in the midst of trying times...

- Times **when worry seems to be gaining traction** in your life.
- David starts off... *"I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."*

So, what does David mean when he says, **"I lift my eyes up?"** Well, he's using a **common Hebrew expression** that goes way beyond a physical gaze.

- It means to notice something... to **find your attention and heart captured** by what's in front of you.
- God says to Abraham, for example... *"Lift up your eyes. All the land that you see, north, south, east, and west I will give you."*
- You see, in Hebrew, lifting your eyes up **always spoke of having your imagination activated** in some new way.

There's a wonderful use of this phrase in **Genesis 24** where Rebekah sees her future spouse for the first time.

- It says that **Rebekah lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac** and asked, *"Who is that man? That striking figure of a man?"*
- When **Joyce first saw me** she said just that... *"Who's that striking figure of a man. That's gonna be my trophy husband!"*

The idea of "lifting your eyes up" is a Hebrew **way of expressing one of the greatest of human freedoms** we have...

- A freedom that nobody, *not even guards in a concentration camp* or a *king in the Ararat plains* can take away from you...
- And that is the **freedom to decide** where you will **place your mind** and **focus your attention**...

I can focus my attention on *my* problems... on *my* worries... on *my* troubles... *or* I can focus on God.

- Whatever is going on in your body, your bank account, your world, your house, your office, your relationships...
- you'll have to decide where you will focus your eyes.
- Of course, knowing the heart and character of our God, **the author is encouraging us... to set our gaze on Him.**

**"I lift up my eyes to the mountains..."** Now we tend to think of hills and mountains as positive things because they're so beautiful to us.

- Man... I've been to places where it just seemed as though God took an iron and flattened the whole place.
- And if you were to ask someone in the ancient world how they felt about that... well... **as much as I thank Him for the mountains**, they'd prefer the **ironed-out plains** anytime!

You see, in the ancient world, **hills** (let alone mountains) made traveling a lot more difficult. They got in the way!

- This is why **Isaiah 40:4** says that in the day of the Lord...  
*"Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low..."*
- And why? Because in the ancient world, mountains and hills were nothing but trouble.

Yes, they might be beautiful... but **you know that traveling a mile over a hill or mountain** took a whole lot more time than traveling through the plains.

- And, beyond that, thieves, kidnappers, and wild beasts, *who couldn't hide in the open plains*, could easily hide in the hills.
- So, in a sense, **mountains represent our circumstances**... whether they reflect amazing opportunities... or challenging obstacles.

You see, sometimes my circumstances might be beautiful... but sometimes... well, not so much!

- **Family** problems. **Health** problems. **Money** problems. **Job** problems. **Emotional** problems. **Relational** problems...

- And, **as you think about a few of those things**, ask yourself, *“How am I going to make it over that hill? Where am I going to find help from my circumstances?”*

Oftentimes, even before we face the actual problem... before we actually lose our job, for example,

- we'll experience this **internal, spiritual problem of worry**, which sucks life out of us.
- You just look at people who never lift up their eyes. They just walk around with their head down, because worry is killing them.

Did you know that the word *worry* comes from the German word *wuergen*, which originally means **to strangle, or constrict, or choke**.

- That's worry! **To illustrate this**, go ahead, real quick... and turn to the person next to you.
- Now, put your hands on their throat and gently choke them till they turn red.
- **You're getting a little sense of what worry does** to somebody. It chokes the life out of you.
- And **that's why worry is never God's will** for anyone's life!

It was Jesus who said, *“I have come that you may have life.”* But worry chokes that life right out of you.

- In **Matthew 13**, after sharing the Parable of the Sower, Jesus explains in **verse 23**, that *“the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it...”*
- But in **verse 22** He explains that, *“**The seed falling among the thorns** refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of **this life... choke the word, making it unfruitful.**”*
- In other words, worry chokes the life that Jesus intends for us to live. Worry is never God's will for anybody's life. It never is.

I lift up my eyes to the hills. I see my circumstances. I think, **Where does my help come from?**

- When we're hurting, we can look for help in so many places. But over time, we all discover that real help comes from the Lord.

- **This word help is a beautiful word.** It's used over 200 times in the Bible, most often connected to God. God is our help!
- It's amazing to me that the **God of the Universe would want to be known as our helper...** but He does!

In **Psalm 46**, we're told that "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble.*"

- In fact, **Moses named one of his sons Eleazar**, which means, "*God is my help.*"
- Now, for some people, that's great news... but, for others, it's a **hard pill to swallow** because it **implies that I'm the kind of creature who actually needs help!**

Listen... at the end of the day, worry takes on all kinds of forms.

Sometimes it's the **pain of anxiety** or the **burden of fear**.

- But it can also take the form of **workaholism** or **anger**.
- Sometimes people *try* to avoid worry by **medicating** themselves with **alcohol** or **achievements**.
- They might just try to hide by spending hours on the **Internet** or **watching TV**... or getting lost in an **unhealthy relationship**.
- Oftentimes we **deal with worry by going into control mode**.

But, this is why releasing worry has to start with this recognition... *that I'm not in control*. **Let's all say that out-loud. I'm not in control!**

- Can anybody here guarantee your body will stay healthy? Nope.
- You can **eat right**, you can exercise twice a day, you can **see a doctor** once a week, but that clock is ticking.
- Ultimately your body is not in your hands.

**Can you control the economy?** No. You can work hard, you can try to save, but ultimately the economy is way beyond merely human power.

- **Can you make your spouse change?** Apparently there is some ambiguity on this question.
- The correct answer would be no! You can't change your spouse. **God can** change your spouse. That's good news, isn't it?!
- But even more important... **God can change your spouse's spouse**. Think about that one!

You see, our tendency is to want to *trust in self*. I want to trust *my strength*, *my gifts*, *my education*, *my social skills*, *my finances*, *my network* of people...

- but **one day I'm going to run into a mountain** where none of that stuff can help. And **one day you will too**.
- And **on that day you will want to know where to lift up your eyes**.
- *"I lift up my eyes...where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord..."*

But let me ask you... *What kind of help are we talking about here?*

You see, **this brings us back to the comment** I made at the very beginning of the message...

- that God is about *more than anxiety-avoidance*. This is important to understand.
- This doesn't mean **I'll always get the help I need** to check off everything on my to-do list.
- It doesn't mean that **I'll experience just the right set of circumstances** I'd prefer to have in order to be happy.
- **It doesn't mean God will always assist me in getting ahead.**

It brings us to **one of the most important words** in this Psalm... a word that gets repeated over and over again... referring to the kind of help that God gives: *Watch*.

- Over and over the psalmist says this. ***"the Lord Himself watches over you... He will watch over your life. He will watch over your coming. He will watch over your going."***
- That little word *watch* **gets used five times in these few verses.**

Listen guys... David was a real man who lived a long time ago... described by God as a "man after God's own heart."

- You and I won't ever meet him this side of heaven... but **if he were here right now**, there's something he'll really want you grab hold of.
- And that's that **God is a watcher**... that He's THE watcher!
- And if God is the watcher... than you and I... **we're the watchees!**

This might be a hard pill to swallow for some people... but, **we're ultimately the kind of beings** who need to be watched over.

- It can be hard for **self-sufficient rugged individualists to accept**, but if no one is watching over our little lives then we're doomed!
- But, if I have a Watcher... well... it changes everything.

A number of years ago, **Joyce and I had taken Rebecca and Sarah to Disney World**. They were pretty young. Becca was 4 and Sarah was just under 2.

- Now, I know I've shared this with you before... and have no idea why I'd share it again...
- But, we were outside in the pool area of our hotel just talking. There were so many people around.

I could **almost hear my mom's voice**... "*Craig, you've got to keep a good eye on those girls!*"

- Are you kidding? You don't need to tell me that. **I'm a good watcher**. I'm a great watcher!
- Can you see where this story is going? I immediately looked around... and, no kidding... **I found Sarah on the bottom of the pool**... just looking up at me so calmly with her eyes open.

Needless to say, I didn't remain calm. I sprinted into the pool with all my clothes on a grabbed her into my arms...

- holding back my own tears so I wouldn't freak her out any more than she was.
  - o All I could think was *I'm so grateful you're alive!*
  - o I'm so grateful **you are so tiny and you will not remember** any of this!
  - o I am so grateful **you can't talk yet and that** you won't be able to tell Grandma about this!
- Over and over again, the psalmist reminds us... our God is watching over us!

Whatever is going on in your life, in your **body**, with your **money**, your **relationships**, He's watching over you!

- ***We're told here that "the Lord will watch over your coming***

***and going..."***

- He's watching you on your way out of the house in the morning... and He's watching you when you home and drift off to sleep.
- It's a beautiful way of saying *every moment*. He'll never turn away from you... He'll **NEVER stop watching after you**.

**The Psalmist then tells us that *"...the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night."***

- When you're traveling by day in the desert... sun, heat, sunstroke, and thirst, can really kill you.
- I was traveling once near Afghanistan in a Soviet-made jeep. It was incredibly hot... easily over 110-115.

We brought what we thought was enough water with us... but the radiator in the jeep was leaking...

- and we had to empty our water in the tank to keep the beast running.
- Well... by the late afternoon... under that sun, I would've done anything for just a sip of water.
- But here, the Psalmist is telling us that *"...the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night."*

Now, we get the sun part of this... **but the idea of the moon causing you harm** may sound a bit strange to you.

- You see, in the ancient world, **the moon was often associated with mental impairment**.
- In the New Testament, for example, **the word *moonstruck*** is used twice in that way (in Matt 4:24 & 17:15)... to describe a person who was demonized.

Even in English we still maintain this odd association, which is why **the word lunar is connected to the word lunatic**.

- And yet, *"In your waking, in your sleeping, in your coming and your going, through your day and through your night, from the sun and from the moon, God the watcher neither slumbers nor sleeps. He is the shade at your right hand."*
- You see, right there... at your right hand... that's where a

**counselor** would be. That's where a **bodyguard** should be... where a **Father** should be... *at your right hand*.

And then the result of this is, **"He will not let your foot slip..."** It can happen so easily, can't it?

- A few years ago, I was hiking off the trails around the "garden of the gods" in Colorado Springs.
- I struggled to climb this one, particularly steep area that was mostly fine gravel and dirt.
- But it wasn't till I starting climbing down that I realized just how dangerous this was. I mean... one slip of the foot and, well... you know.

Truth is, I did slip... and I went flying down that piece of mountain about 20' before I got a hold of something. It was pretty scary!!

- Well, needless to say, in the ancient world, not unlike today, having a foot slip in the mountains can be fatal.
- Maybe that's what David's talking about when he says that **"He will not let your foot slip..."**
- It's a common expression in the Bible. And yet, it **doesn't always mean what we might want it to mean.**

It doesn't refer to being kept physically or financially or relationally safe & secure, for example.

- More often than not, the idea of your foot slipping **refers to our tendency to stray too far** off the path of obedience.
- You may know that the Old Testament often talks about **"the path of the righteous."**
- So to have a foot slip has to do with our straying from that straight path.

Notice the language David uses in **Psalm 73**. **"But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."**

Can you **imagine envying prosperous people who don't deserve to be envied**? That would never happen today, would it?!

- But in the ancient world **that kind of thing went on all the**

**time.**

- And the psalmist says, *"I was there... I almost gave into it... a life of envy, bitterness, anger, ingratitude. My foot almost slipped. I almost lost my foothold."*

In other words, to say that God will never let your foot slip **doesn't mean** that God will keep you from all **problems**, all **pain**, all **trouble**, all **discomfort**, all **loss**.

- But through it all... through all the challenging seasons we might face,
- What the Psalmist is saying is that **God will help us stay close** to Him...
- That God will not allow any outside force or person to harm the soul that trusts in Him; that **nothing eternal is at risk** in your life.

Now **everything temporal is at risk**. My **job**, my **body**, my **money**... **everything temporal**. Nothing eternal.

- This is reality. **This is the truth that shaped a life like Dietrich Bonhoeffer.**
- This is why **another man named Paul**, who also was martyred said, *"What then shall trouble me? Danger, hardship, famine, persecution, sword? No. None of these can separate me from the love of Christ. In all these things we are more than conquerors."*

We're part of a community, **of whom untold thousands** have sacrificed their lives for the name of Jesus, and counted it a privilege.

- **We are not cushioned in life; but kept securely in His presence.**
- Bonhoeffer wrote that *"Peace is the opposite of security... To demand guarantees is to want to protect oneself. Peace means giving oneself completely to God, wanting no security, but in faith and obedience, resting in the hand of Almighty God."*
- "I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord..."

**Bonhoeffer would lose so much** from an earthly standpoint. **He never**

**got married**, he was **engaged when he died**, was **in prison for the last two years** of his life...

- While he was still in his thirties he would be hung on a gallows.
- He offered himself as a “living sacrifice,” as **Romans 12:1** says, “holy and pleasing to God.”
- In fact, his **cellmate noted his last spoken words** as he was leaving to be executed... he said, *"This is the end, but for me the beginning of life."*

**I'll read those words** from somebody like him and they can sound so intimidating, because I don't feel like I have much hero in me.

- But, truth is, Bonhoeffer was no superhero. He **struggled...** He **feared...** He **doubted.**
- In fact, **Bonhoeffer wrote a poem** just one month before he was executed... a poem I read several years ago. He's in his cell waiting to be killed by the Nazis. This is what he wrote:

*"Who am I? They often tell me I would step from my cell's confinement calmly, cheerfully, firmly, like a squire from his country house. Who am I? They often tell me I would talk to my warden freely, and friendly, and clearly, as though it were mine to command. Who am I? They also tell me I would bear the days of misfortune calmly, smilingly, proudly, like one accustomed to win.*

*Am I then really all that which other men tell of, or am I only what I know of myself? Restless, longing, and sick, like a bird in a cage struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat; yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds; thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness; trembling with anger at evils and petty humiliations; tossing in expectation of great events; powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance; weary and empty at praying, at thinking; faint and ready to say farewell to it all.*

*Who am I? This or the other? Am I one person today and tomorrow another? Am I both at once, a hypocrite before others, and before myself a contemptibly woe-begone weakling? Or is something within me still like a beaten army fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved? Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine. **Whoever I***

**am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine."**

Whoever I am... **all I know**; the only thing that ultimately gives me strength and hope and life... is that **I'm Yours**.

***I will lift up my eyes to the mountains... where does my help come from? My help comes from YOU, God... maker of heaven & earth.***

- I think of **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** reciting this psalm as a young man preaching his first sermon...
- and wonder if maybe he recited it again as he walked up the steps to the gallows to die.

You see, this Psalm... ***it's not*** a Hallmark Poem. This **isn't a promise that your life will be cushioned**.

- Instead, these are more somber, **better words for a richer, more noble journey**.
- I will lift up my eye to the hills. For **there is another hill**, many miles away, many years away, **and on that hill there is a cross...**
- and **on that cross there is a Man**, and **on that Man is all our sin**, and **all our hope**.

The **name of that hill is Calvary**, and the **name of that Man is Jesus**, and **He died so we can live**.

- But the **only way to really live is to die with Him first**;
- to **die to my sin**, to the **smallness of my selfishness**, to my **fear of pain** and discomfort.
- We're not free from worry because believing God cushions us from pain. We die with Jesus so that we can live.

**Everybody came into this room carrying some burden**. Maybe it's a **child**. Maybe it's **money**.

- Maybe it's **work**. Maybe it's a **diagnosis**. Maybe it's a **loss**. Maybe it's **failure**.
- Maybe you're worried about the future... **that you're simply not prepared for what might lie ahead of you**.
- Maybe you're worried that **you wont have what you need**.

Maybe you're worried that **you'll be hurt by something or someone** in the future.

- Maybe you're worried that **you'll be left alone.**
- Maybe the **reality of all you're worried about is unsolvable and uncontrollable...**
- and you know that seeds of hopelessness and fear are becoming bigger than your faith in who God is.

To you... **I want to remind you...** in just the same way **David** wanted to remind you... the way **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** wanted to remind you...

- That **the One who watches over you will not slumber**
- The One who watches over you **will not let your foot slip.**
- He will **watch over your life.**
- He will **watch over your coming and going** both now and forevermore!

***"I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth..."***

PRAY: *Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine.*

- *"God, I'm lifting my eyes. I am not going to walk out of here with this worry. I'm giving it to You."*
- Lay it down right now.