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Dear Friends in Christ, Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen!

Let's begin by getting some answers to this question, (if you've read the book *Anxious for Nothing: Finding Calm in a Chaotic World*, you don't get to answer). Here's the question: What is the wildest river in the world? (Invite and affirm responses: Amazon, Mississippi, Colorado, Nile) All great answers. According to Lucado (which we're borrowing heavily from in this series) and I think he's right, the wildest river in the world is the river called "IF ONLY".

A lot of time we stand on the banks of the river "If Only" and we want to get to the other side but we get stuck. If only I were thinner I'd have the good life. If only I had a few more bucks I'd have the good life. If only the kids would call, if only my spouse would dial it back a notch, If only my spouse would step it up, if only I could leave home, move home, get married, have kids.

It can seem like the good life is always just one "If Only" away, one purchase, one new job, one election, one more transition. So we stand there on the banks of the river "If Only" wanting to cross, not sure if we ever will, we want what we are convinced is the "good life" on the other side but there's too many "If only's" in the way. But we so badly want to cross the river named "IF ONLY".

So what do we do think is going to help us cross? Work more hours, borrow more money, pile on more responsibility, we keep our face in our phone for fear we might miss one Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook or other social media posting about what our friend had for lunch. How's all that working for us? Not so well—we still find ourselves stuck on the banks of the river called “if only”.

That's why our anchor verse for the series is so important. It comes from Philippians 4:6-7 where it reads **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”**

It's so important---because what Scripture is getting at is not primarily “here are a few things for you to do to quit worrying or being anxious” as if there's some kind of magical position. It's encouraging us to see the world God and ourselves in a new way. It's encouraging us to yes maybe do some new things, but more importantly it's calling us to become something new. A person of gratitude.

Some of you might recall Lucado's interesting acronym C.A.L.M. C is for Celebrate: Celebrate that God is sovereign and ultimately God is in control. Pretty important to remember when it feels like life is spinning out of control. A is for Ask which has to do with praying and knowing The Lord hears. And this week it's

L for Leave your concerns with God with thanksgiving. It goes back to our anchor verse about the link between being thankful and being anxious for nothing. WITH THANKSGIVING is really important.

Think about it, a lot of our praying is Lord, help me, help me, help me. Or Lord please give me, give me, give me. Ord Lord, please show me, show me show me. Kind of a pattern here don't you think? Me, me, me , me , me, meeeee. Still standing on the banks of the river "IF ONLY"---if only you'd give me, if only you'd show me, if only you'd help me. The grateful heart says "Oh look you've already given me...you've already showed me...you've already saved me...you've already helped me. A heart filled with gratitude leaves little room for worry.

Look at Paul's words in Philippians 4:11-13 (GO AHEAD AND GRAB THAT PEW BIBLE AND OPEN IT TO PAGE 995 I promise you it'll be worth it. "Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstance I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, or having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Wow! What would you give to be content in all circumstances? I'm not saying be happy or thankful that everything happens that's different from being

content. I don't know what you'd give but I know what God gave: Right, he gave us Christ. I'm not saying Jesus makes all our issues go away or just have enough faith and you won't have troubles. But it does go back to that acronym, God ultimately is in charge, he hears our prayers and we can leave our worries with him with thanksgiving.

Does your contentment depend on what you drive? Wear or Deposit in the bank? What else does it depend on? The cycle is pretty predictable. If only I get a car then I'll be happy. If only I get married I'll be happy, If only I can retire and be healthy and travel and go somewhere in the winter I'll be happy. Here we are still on the banks of the river of "IF ONLY". By the time you reach old age, you've ridden a roller coaster of hope and disappointment. Your life has felt like this ROLLER COASTER CLIP. And because our contentment is contingent on stuff and circumstances rather thankfulness and gratitude we turn into wounded, worried people. Life has let us down and we know it's going to happen again. Pretty hard to be people filled with the peace of God unless we're filled with thanks and gratitude.

There's a poem that is often used by people and their families dealing with cancer. I'll read you just a small part of it: it can't cripple love...It can't shatter hope...It cannot corrode faith...It cannot eat away peace...It cannot kill friendship

and the poem continues. The obvious idea is that even though cancer is brutal and sometimes deadly it can't destroy a lot of the beautiful things in life.

The apostle Paul wrote these verses about being content and not being anxious because he know that while knowing and believing in Christ didn't make the tough times go away it did put them in perspective How, because when we trust that God is sovereign, when we go to God in prayer, and with Gratitude leave our worries with The Lord, it continues to be more about God than me.

Like that Cancer poem when we become people who take our anxiety and worry to God and leave them there with gratitude we begin to be less anxious and worry less because our faith understand that even death can't steal our joy forever? No Jesus is greater than death. That even failure can't take our joy? no Jesus is greater than our sin. That sickness and ill health can't steal our joy? No, God has promised, whether on this side of the grave or the other, to heal us. Can disappointment take our joy? No, because even though our plans may not work out, we know God's plan will.

Let's get real and stay real about this. We may ride that roller coaster of feelings and emotions. We may feel like worry and anxiousness steal everything from us. This stuff is not to be like some magic pill a person takes and all worry

and anxiousness goes away. But being grateful developing gratitude about life does go a long way in getting us off the banks of the river of “IF ONLY”.

There are studies that show gratitude and it’s positive effects. That grateful people tend to be more empathetic and forgiving. People who kept a gratitude journal have a more positive outlook on life (I’m not a person who journals but I believe it). People who are grateful are less self-centered and materialistic. Gratitude improves self-esteem, creates better relationships. Grateful people sleep better and live longer. If you could buy a pill that would do all that stuff, man it would be one of the greatest cures the world has ever seen.

I’d like to ask you to try something today at some point. Stand on the river named “If Only” and go through all of your “If Only” thoughts and be honest and be real. Be honest and transparent with yourself, no games about the things that cause you to be anxious and worry.

Then I invite you to remember that God is sovereign, take all of this stuff to God in pray, and leave them with God and don’t take them back though you’ll be tempted to. And the energy you’d typically spend on the “if only’s” and anxiety and worry, spend that same energy on being grateful and see what happens. God ahead and try it and who knows maybe you’ll stay C.A.L.M. I pray that God will bless you with a moment or two of that peace that passes all human understanding.

In Jesus name, AMEN!!!