

# SPECIAL MESSAGES

## HOW TO FIGHT FOR PEACE

### Philippians 4:4-9

We are continuing this “How To” miniseries that we are doing -- “How to Principles of the Christian Life.” How to live for Christ in specific ways. Today we are going to talk about something extremely important. I want to read the scriptures then see what the Lord has for us through his word. Philippians 4:4-9 says this:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, 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 your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

God, we give you our lives. We give you this time. Would you use it mightily to impact us? Let our hearts be eager to receive the Word this morning. Let our ears be open. We need what you have to say. It’s not what I have to say. It’s what you have to say. Teach us this morning. Change us. Like Stefan said earlier, that we would leave differently than we came in. We love you. We need you. In Christ’s name I pray. Amen.

I want to talk to you about something serious this morning. It is this title I have up here: “How to Fight for Peace.” You saw already in the scriptures a bit of what we are going to talk about. It is a very serious topic, an important topic, one that impacts all of us. I thought at least as I start, what better way to introduce a serious sermon than to have a doll involved.

I want to tell you about this doll, okay? This doll is old. Anybody recognize what kind of doll this is? “My Buddy.” Thank you to some peers out there. This is a “My Buddy” doll. This was super popular

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in the late '80's and maybe early 90's. It was a doll that had a whole theme song and commercials. Don't start singing the song, because I know in your mind, those that know it are singing it.

My wife, who then was not my wife, gave me this doll when we were teenagers. Yes. And what better way for a girl you like to give you a doll called, "My Buddy." You know: the friend zone. It's hard to get out of that, but I prevailed at some point, and we are more than buddies now.

So, she gave me this doll. It was a strange gift for a girl to give a guy, I understand. But just so you know, I was grateful to have the gift. Literally, I must have been 15, 16, 17 – something like that, and in order to show support for the doll, I would keep it in my room. It would just be sitting on a chair like this, or on a dresser, in my room.

These dolls are really cute and cuddly in the daytime. At night, if you have trouble sleeping like me, or you wake up throughout the night and you have a history of nightmares and/or other difficult nighttime events, this is like the devil in your room. It's an amazing cause of anxiety and stress when you wake up and just out of nowhere, there's My Buddy! Staring into my soul, ready to jump off the counter or wherever he was.

Now he lives in my daughter's room on her dresser. When guests come to sleep over we usually give them my daughter's room, and every now and again we will hear, "That is a terrifying doll in your room. What is the deal with that?" So now we have to keep it. I won't keep it up here for you now, because I don't want to be distracting. Thank you, honey, for giving me that doll and for supporting me just now.

It's amazing the things in our lives that can cause us stress and anxiety. Even the cutest and cuddliest and most innocent of things can really bring about trouble for us. It's funny to laugh at and goof around with the My Buddy doll, but the reality is that we are a people who are anxious. We are a people who are full of worry and stress and anxiety. We gave you a survey months ago to see how you are doing, how we are doing, and one of the questions we asked was, "What are some things that you are struggling with?" It was no surprise that anxiety was right up at the top.

If I were to ask the question: "Are you anxious?" the odds are you would say yes. Not just, "Yeah, I'm mildly worried about this or this," but the odds are that most in this room are struggling severely with worry and fear and anxiety. The statistics are staggering in our country, in our continent, in our world. If we just focus in on North America or America, it is the #1 mental health issue – anxiety-related disorders. Depending on who you ask, we are somewhere in the range of 20%. Some say

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even 30% of us really battle fear, worry, and anxiety and anxiety-related issues. That's like 40, 50, 60 million people between the ages of 15 and 54 – 65% of people take prescription medicine for this every single day. It costs the U.S. more than \$42 billion dollars a year.

Maybe even more alarming than that is how it's impacting our kids. 25% of kids, one in four between the ages of 13 to 18 are struggling with anxiety-related illness. That's unbelievable. We can't escape it. We can't escape what is before us: anxiety, fear, worry. The reality is that we all deal with these things, some of us to a much higher degree. So what do we do? What do we do with this mountain of an issue before us?

If you are a Christian here, you are not immune to the realities of this. But in the scriptures we would hope God would help us with this and talk to us about it, because this is not a new issue. This is something we deal with and have dealt with as a human race forever. We worry.

You know, it's funny, because you read the text, and if you do struggle with anxiety for some things, or for everything, what's the last thing that you want to hear someone say to you when you're really battling anxiety? "Don't be anxious." Right? That's like when someone's really worked up and mad. If you say, "Calm down," it's like pouring oil on a fire. "Don't tell me to calm down! I don't want to calm down!"

You don't want to hear "Don't be anxious" when you are anxious. But that's exactly what Paul is saying. He is saying, "Don't be anxious." And not just, "Don't be anxious." He says, "Don't be anxious about anything." That should make us feel a couple things. Sometimes when we hear that it just makes us more anxious, because then we start worrying about what we're worrying about. It's like, "Man, I knew it was bad, but now I shouldn't even feel this way."

Especially as Christians, I think sometimes we get into a mindset where we are really struggling, because, "Man, I'm a Christian. I'm supposed to believe in God and this is not how I'm supposed to be." We start getting even deeper into the pit because of it. Let's just face it, it's frustrating if someone says that to us. Because if you're dealing with it, you understand that you can't just turn it off. I can't just say, "Oh, don't be anxious." "Okay, good. Glad you told me." It seems impossible.

Maybe it's helpful if we just look at what anxiety is, and kind of define it and talk a little bit about it. When we think of anxiety, we think it's a response. It's a reaction to a stressful situation. It's a reaction to danger, or a perceived danger. That reaction can be mild or it can be severe. It can be so severe that it impacts the way that we live. It actually impacts our physical bodies, where our

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hearts start to race, or our legs get weak like jelly. Or we have pain in our bodies. We have fatigue, brain fog. These things are commonly caused by anxiety.

I think we all would agree that it is not good for us to live like this. But maybe we should ask the question, “Why?” Why shouldn’t we be anxious? Why does Paul go out of his way right here to say, “Okay, do not be anxious about anything”? I’ll say this. I think it’s an obstacle for our relationship with the Lord. Not just an obstacle, but it’s actually opposed. It’s an opposite. It’s the opposite of how God wants us to live, of how he has put something in us -- the way that he wants us to live, the way that he wants us to feel and to think and to act.

When God comes into our lives, he give us something. We call it the fruit of the Spirit. It goes: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – all of these. Now, all of these are not separate fruits that spring up and you’re like, “Oh, I’ve really got the fruit of joy.” And, “I’ve got the fruit of patience.” No, no, no. This is one fruit that springs up and it has these different shoots. It’s all part of one piece of fruit that comes up together. We understand that they cannot be taken independently. Peace is not just one thing that I really want to work on, but I’m great in all these others: love, joy, and self-control. No, no, no -- they fold in together.

When we are struggling in anxiety, we are revealing an unhealthy disposition in us, a block to the fruit that God wants to produce in us. Two times in this passage he uses the word “peace” to talk about the opposite of anxiety. That’s what we would say. The opposite of anxiety, the opposite of worry and fear is peace. It starts to reveal an unhealthy belief about God. When we think about, “What is peace?” and not just peace as this ethereal concept that we are looking at (world peace, etc.), no, no, no. What is the peace of God, talked about in the text here? What is Christian peace?

Because it’s what we want. We all want this, especially if you are prone to worry. Peace has to do with confidence in God’s control over your life. The peace of God is a disposition that is completely constant and confident no matter what the circumstances are. Paul doesn’t say, “Don’t be anxious about anything unless there are some really severe stressors in your life, then it’s okay to start really worrying and get crazy about it. He doesn’t say that. He says, “Don’t be anxious about anything.” Because the peace that God brings is supposed to keep us confident and steadfast in the midst of any circumstance.

Everybody wants this – to be calm and steady in the face of anything. This is why people pay thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars to go to see a guy like Tony Robbins or go to

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any self-help convention and learn these principles so that we can just be at peace within ourselves. Also understanding, guys, that there is a fake peace that tempts us to believe it. There is a pretend peace, the peace that makes you think, “As long as I have the absence of trouble in my life, that’s peace.”

We will go out of our way to keep peace in the home or peace in the workplace. “I’m not going to rock the boat. If my kids are getting crazy, I just want to keep peace. I’ll just let them do what they want.” Or in my marriage: “I don’t want my husband to get upset, so I’m just going to keep peace.” That’s a lie. That’s a fake peace. That’s a false peace. That’s not Christian peace. It’s fake because it promises no conflict. We want to equate peace with the absence of conflict or trouble. Listen, the absence of trouble is not peace. It’s not the peace of God. The peace of God is being unshakable in the midst of the trouble.

Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble,” but then he said, “Take heart, for I have overcome the world.” He didn’t say, “In this world, as long as you trust in me there won’t be any trouble in your life.” That’s not true. That’s not the message of the gospel. That’s not Christian peace.

So, don’t be anxious. Can I say, “Amen” now, and we finish, and we’ll sing our final song? You’re like, “Alright, yes! I heard you.” I won’t do it. No, guys. If we want this kind of peace we have to fight for it. We have to fight intentional battles every single day in order to accomplish this, in order to live in this.

Let me just say this to you: I recognize that severe cases exist, okay? I don’t think that for all the one in three or one in four people struggling with anxiety disorders, all it takes is, “Hey, just read the bible more and everything is going to be just fine. All your anxieties are going to go away.” I don’t believe that that’s the case. I think there are other factors at play. I think that there are times where severe cases need extra help and external help. And there is God’s common grace that helps those things to be mitigated and minimize the symptoms in our life.

But we cannot ignore that this is a spiritual problem as much as it is anything else. Everything is a spiritual problem to one degree or another. Just the fact that sin exists in the world is a spiritual problem that happened because of The Fall. We look back in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve all those years ago. We now exist in a world that is fallen.

I think we can look at this text and learn some things from it this morning. I want to pull out three principles for us so that we can have some tools in the chest to be able to help fight these battles --

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three weapons, three principles – whatever you want to call them. I called them principles: Pray, Purpose, and Practice, just straight from the text. The verb for Purpose is “to purpose yourself to do something.”

So let’s talk about prayer.

### I. Prayer.

Look at what he says in verse 6. He says, “Don’t be anxious about anything.” Then he says, “But here’s what you need to do, and what you need to do first: You need to pray.” When we find peace leaving and anxiety taking over...and that’s how it goes, right? We can feel that happening. As soon as something pops on the TV, you are on your device, or whatever – when you start to feel the physical manifestations of anxiety starting to creep in and the peace leaving us, we need to pray. We need to go to God. Why do we go to God? Because he is the one with the power. It’s so simple, and yet so neglected. I think the simplest things and the most important things in life -- often we are prone to neglect them.

He says, “Don’t be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, tell God what’s happening. That’s prayer and supplication. Don’t get caught up in these two words, whether they mean different things. There’s a different emphasis for each word, but focus on the fact that we just need to pray. We need to pray more. We need to pray often. We need to pray all the time. Tell God what is happening. He is the one. He is the source of help for all of us and needs to be the first place that we go.

Yet like I said, just because it’s a simple concept and a simple thing to do doesn’t mean we do it. We have trouble with this. Think about eating. Eating healthy, eating properly, eating right – it’s not rocket science. It’s not too complicated to do. Simple steps to follow. We know it’s so important. It totally affects the way our brains work, our bodies work, how we feel, and yet it is so hard to consistently do it.

It’s the same with prayer. So simple. So important. We see it in God’s word. We know when we’ve done it we feel better. We have a better relationship with the Lord, a better relationship with other people. God moves in that, and yet we then go through seasons where we just absolutely neglect doing it because it’s hard to do consistently.

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We can ask why. Why do you think that is? Let's go back to the eating illustration. Why is it hard to eat well? Why is it hard to do the simple things – to cut out the bad stuff and only keep the good stuff? Because we just want sugar. We just want bread. We just want doughnuts. That's it. Why don't you eat broccoli? Because I hate it. Why are you always eating doughnuts? Because they're delicious!

When anxiety hits, when we are faced with anxiety we run to the things that taste good. We run to TV. We run to friends. We run to Facebook. We run to sports. We run to whatever it is that in that moment will give us an instant gratification, a quick fix. So if it's really going bad in my life and I run first to prayer, well it's hard, because I don't always get the immediate gratification that I want in that moment where I start to feel better, even though it is the most important thing and will absolutely do the best thing for me. No, I just want to turn on my TV show and laugh and run away from everything else. There's that fake peace I was telling you about. It promises to help you, but really all it's doing is just dulling you. It's not removing the problems. It's not really fixing the deeper issues. So we run to the things that give us instant gratification, and it is not the right move.

God is telling us what's first when we are dealing with anxiety. We see it's not just about praying. It's about praying with a certain attitude. We have to come with an attitude that is – well, what does it say? "Pray with thanksgiving." Oh great. Now, not only are you saying don't be anxious, but now I have to not be anxious and I have to be thankful, and eat your vegetables, and...you know.

That's how we can see it, because this is where it really gets hard. When we start dealing with worry we are not always in a thankful mood. We are anxious. We are stressed. We want to complain. We want to communicate all the things that are going wrong, so if we actually do pray it kind of turns into this big whining session. But God says, "Okay, come to me and tell me everything." That's what we do. We go and tell him everything that is going on in our lives and we ask him for what we want. And he says, "Do that, but remember, I want you to be thankful." There is something that happens in us when we are thankful in our prayer life.

You say, "Well, how do I do that?" I'll give you an example. It's going to God and saying, "God, I am so concerned about my finances. I'm not sure there's going to be enough money at the end of the month. We have this child on the way and I just don't know how I'm going to pay for this child's college. When the child needs to eat, are we going to have money to pay for it? Is my job going to grow? It's so expensive to live down here in South Florida, and everybody is just so mean here, and

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my wife, and my car..." That's how it goes. It's like a steamroller. We start letting it out and it all comes out.

But here's the flip. I'm not even saying it's wrong to do that, but we add to it. We say, "This is a mess here, but God, I am so thankful. I am so thankful for how you've been with me. You've been with me for my life, for all these years. You have never failed me. You have always provided for me. You have always taken care of me. You have always fed me and clothed me. You have put people around me that are wonderful."

"And even if all that wasn't true, I have been given the greatest gift imaginable, and that is that Jesus Christ has saved me from my sin. And if everything else were removed, that would be enough for me to be thankful and to praise you for. Thank you that you love me more than I can imagine and will always take care of me."

Man, do you see how it changes things when we start to go to God like that? When we pray like that it affects our hearts. We start to believe what we are saying, and in the moment you may not feel thankful, but when you start to speak thankfully, things change inside. I know it's not always easy to do, especially when you are in the thick of it, but it's why God calls this the sacrifice of praise.

In Hebrews, chapter 13 verse 15 he calls it the sacrifice of praise. It says, "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." Listen, sacrifices are hard. If it was easy it wouldn't be a sacrifice. But we praise God even in those times when it's just not pleasant to do because of what's going on around us. You see, it's easy to praise God when things are going well, but God is pleased when we praise him in the midst of our trouble.

Of course, we could go on and on and on about how important prayer is and how we need to be doing it. We need to go to God with everything. Hopefully you get the picture, because in verse 8 he goes on to tell us not only to pray but to purpose, the second tool in fighting for peace.

### II. Purpose.

He says to be intentional about what you think about. Peace isn't just the absence of fear or the removal of negative things. It's about the presence of something. He says, "Look, you want peace? Then I want you to think about these things." Look at that list! "...whatever is true, honorable, just,

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pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise, think on these things.” And let’s just face it, my friends, it is hard. There is not much in this world designed to help us think this way.

Most things that we take in with our senses, especially hearing and seeing, are designed to cause us stress and anxiety. TV shows are not designed to make you feel at peace and at rest. No, because they want you stirred up. They want you worked up so that you’ll come back to watch the next episode, when who knows what happened to \_\_\_\_\_. I was going to bring up a character from a TV show. It’s best I don’t.

The news? Come on. “Breaking news, da, da, da, fire, devil horns.” It’s all coming down to like: “Oh my gosh, what’s happening? Oh, cat caught in a tree.” They want us to feel a certain way.

Facebook, social media, our devices – everything is an anxiety causer, an anxiety elevator. They are finding more and more that social media is an amazingly powerful cause of anxiety. There is the compare and despair factor, where you are looking at social media and seeing everybody’s beautiful, perfect life. There are family outings where they are frolicking at the beach with sand flying, snowball fights in the snow, and family dinners where everybody is around the table and the pictures are filtered just so nicely. And you are eating your Dairy Queen blizzard looking at this going, “Well, that’s not my life.” It’s fake.

One study in Chicago found that social media is actually more addictive than cigarettes. It’s not even so much the use of it. It’s the fear of it being taken away -- when you’re disconnected from it and you are just, “I need to know what’s going on! What did she have for breakfast?! I need a picture of a waffle! Of the doughnut she ate, so I can feel better!”

Am I saying that you need to quit all of these outlets – news, TV, social media – in order to get better here? Maybe? We are not generally prescriptive here when we preach, when we talk about these things, and I’m not going to be today. But I would say this: maybe. Maybe at the least scaling way back on all of these things could be an effective and essential tool for your spiritual health, your emotional health. Let’s just say they’re all wrapped up together. I think many of us need to cut some things out, things that aren’t true, honorable, pure, lovely, worthy of praise.

Do you know the best way to find out if a type of food is hurting you? Just cut it out of your diet for a full month. Cut it all out. Anything that could potentially be detrimental to your health -- you just cut them out for a full month, then you slowly add them back in one at a time.

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So when you start adding dairy back in and as soon as you eat it you start throwing up, you are like, “Oh, I can’t handle dairy. It affects me.” Whereas it might not affect someone else as much. We need to do this in our lives for our spiritual health. There was a time when I realized that I could not watch doctor shows. I just couldn’t anymore. There was a big anxiety attack every time, because I thought I had everything that was being displayed on the TV in front of me. There was that moment where it’s like, “Okay, do I watch House and be miserable all night, or do I not watch the show and kind of cut that out so that I can be healthy?”

Part of the problem, I think, is that we have a hard time recognizing that what we are doing is dangerous. We are lulled into thinking that everything is okay. We think, “This doesn’t impact me. I can deal with that. I can handle that. It doesn’t affect me the way it might affect you, so I’m just going to watch it, or I’m going to do this. Don’t worry, I can handle it.”

I think it’s just foolish to think that way. Everything is not okay. There are some things that are bad for your soul. Don Carson is a wonderful preacher, pastor, writer. He said, “The sad fact is that many people dwell on dirt without knowing that it’s dirt. But the wise Christian,” he says, “will see plenty of dirt in the world, but will recognize it as dirt, precisely because everything that is clean has captured his or her mind.”

Man, we need the lovely, the pure, the true, the commendable, the praiseworthy, the excellent. We have so little of it. It’s so not excellent. We are just so happy to play in the mud puddles because we think it’s joyful in the moment, but it’s killing us inside. Where do you think is the primary place that you will find what’s true and honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable? It’s the scriptures, right?

You see how it all goes together? We need to be praying. We need to be in the bible. When you read the bible, it starts to feed you. The reason we love sugar is because when we eat it, it tastes so good in the moment. But what’s happening? It’s destroying us inside. When we eat things that don’t taste good like the broccoli and we take vitamins and we do these other things, yeah, in the moment it’s not great, but what is it doing? It’s actually strengthening us from the inside out so that when sickness comes, or when the germs are approaching, our bodies are impenetrable and fight them off.

Well, our spiritual lives need that. This is why we pray. This is why we read the scriptures. Yeah, it may not be the same as watching TV. It can’t compete with what is coming across the TV. It’s just

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not going to be the same. It doesn't affect our brainwaves the same way. So that will seem more appealing, but it's killing us. Whereas the scriptures and prayer and these things are building us up. They are strengthening our inner man so that when the crazy comes and the bad starts to attack, we are strong and we can stand and fight.

What we set our minds on will shape how we look, how we think, act, and feel. And just like anything else, practice makes perfect. We are low on time so I'm going to quickly go through this here. This is the third point in verse 9: Practice.

### III. Practice.

Pray, Purpose, Practice. Understand, guys, we will not drift into peace. We will not drift into the peace of Christ, into the peace of God. If we just let our lives go and say, "Oh, wherever the winds take me I'll just go," you will end up in misery and anxiety. That's not a slight on, "Oh, God's in control. If he wants to move me out he will." Well, of course he will. He can do a lot of things that he doesn't do because of his different plans and ways about him.

If we decide to drift and not fight in this battle, we will drift into all these dark places. Anxiety will win, so he says to practice. "Practice what I've modeled for you." So what do we need? We need models in this life. He says what you've learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. We need people in our lives who we can look at and say, "Wow, they are not perfect, but they are a model of what I would like to be. They are a model of the peace of God in life.

I promise you, if you go to them and say, "Hey, you're such an amazing model of peace," they are going to be like, "I don't know what you're talking about, because I'm a mess too." But, that's a good sign if they say that. You don't want to go to someone who says, "Yep, totally at peace. Life is easy." No, no. We need men and women who seem to have the peace of God overflowing from them. We need to find them. We need to get around them, watch them, listen to them, learn from them. We need to ask questions and learn as much as we can from their patterns of life, then we need to practice.

Guys, again, drifting will take us one way. We need to practice. Is practicing fun? No. Is it necessary? Absolutely. In anything. We need to practice these things, thinking about what is true and lovely and pure and worthy of praise and excellent. We need to set our minds on that. We need to think about that. That is practice. And I just want to say this. I'm going to ask the worship

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team to come up as we are going to finish. We have to do this. Let me be stronger for a second. We have to do this. The first two things – to pray and to purpose – we can actually do that by ourselves for the most part. We can pray by ourselves. We can start to change what we set our minds on alone, without other people. It's this third one that demands that other people are involved. It's a community event. Other people have to be involved.

I'm going to tell you why I think this is so important. I strongly believe that we are becoming more and more isolated as a culture, more and more individualistic, and it is killing us. It is causing more anxiety than ever in us. We are the most prosperous nation in all the world. We are the most technically advanced nation that's ever existed, and we are the most anxious people that has ever lived.

How? As technology and prosperity improved, so has anxiety and all these other crazy things that have hurt us spiritually, emotionally, and physically. I think it's often tied to the fact that we do not connect with one another. We are pulled more and more apart from each other because of technology and other things. Even though it seems like we are pushed closer and closer because we can reach anywhere in the world, it's not true. It's a fake connection.

This is real. When we get into small groups, that's real. When we connect on a personal level, that is real and we need to do that. Unfortunately, more and more people are waiting longer and longer to get married, to do the things that they feel that they need to do. More and more people are waiting longer and longer to have children. Family is just not as important. Dinner time is not as important. Connection is not as important because there are so many things we could be doing. I'm telling you, I think it is a huge part of why we are so troubled. We have abandoned so much of what God has called us to do.

This bible is a book about relationship and connection. This is not a Western book. This is a family atmosphere book. This is written in a context where the family and community were elevated, and we are in a Western culture where it is just not as important. It's all about me and what I can get, and getting my promotion and my bank account right and blah, blah, blah. It's killing us! So I want to tell you to find people in your life. Force yourself out of the comfort zone of individual life in gated communities where it's just, "I have my world and my family and that's it," and get into life with other people. And the second part of that is that you need to be available for other people who need you.

