



PHILIPPIANS 4:4-8

TURNING
ANXIETY
INTO
PRAYER

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Scripture Passage

Philippians 4:4-8

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry 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, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Sermon

Turning Anxiety Into Prayer

We are here at the end of 2020. Today is already the last Sunday. This year will be for us an unforgettable year. Not only for us, but also for all the people in the entire world, it will be an unforgettable year. 2020 will go down in history. In the beginning of this year, we talked about having 20/20 vision. What did we see with that 20/20 vision?

Like a Flower

We saw very clearly how weak we human beings are. We didn't expect that we would see that with that vision. We are truly like grass that withers and flowers that bloom in the morning but fade away in the evening. God taught us well through the Scripture how frail we are.

All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. (Isaiah 40:6, 7)

All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls (1 Peter 1:24)

they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. (Psalm 90:5, 6)

The Scripture is full of this metaphor that we are like grass and flowers. This year, we have truly experienced that we are like a flower that blooms in the morning but withers in the evening. We just forget that we are like a flower. Maybe we want to forget it. Maybe we make ourselves so busy that we don't need to be reminded how weak we are. Just run, run, and run without stopping to look around where we are going. But this year, we couldn't do that anymore. We had to stop to face our reality, and we felt it in our bones.

Changes Bring Anxiety

The keen sense of mortality creates within us existential anxiety. This anxiety is not worrying about trivial things in life. This anxiety is about things that we value, things that are very important in our lives. The more valuable

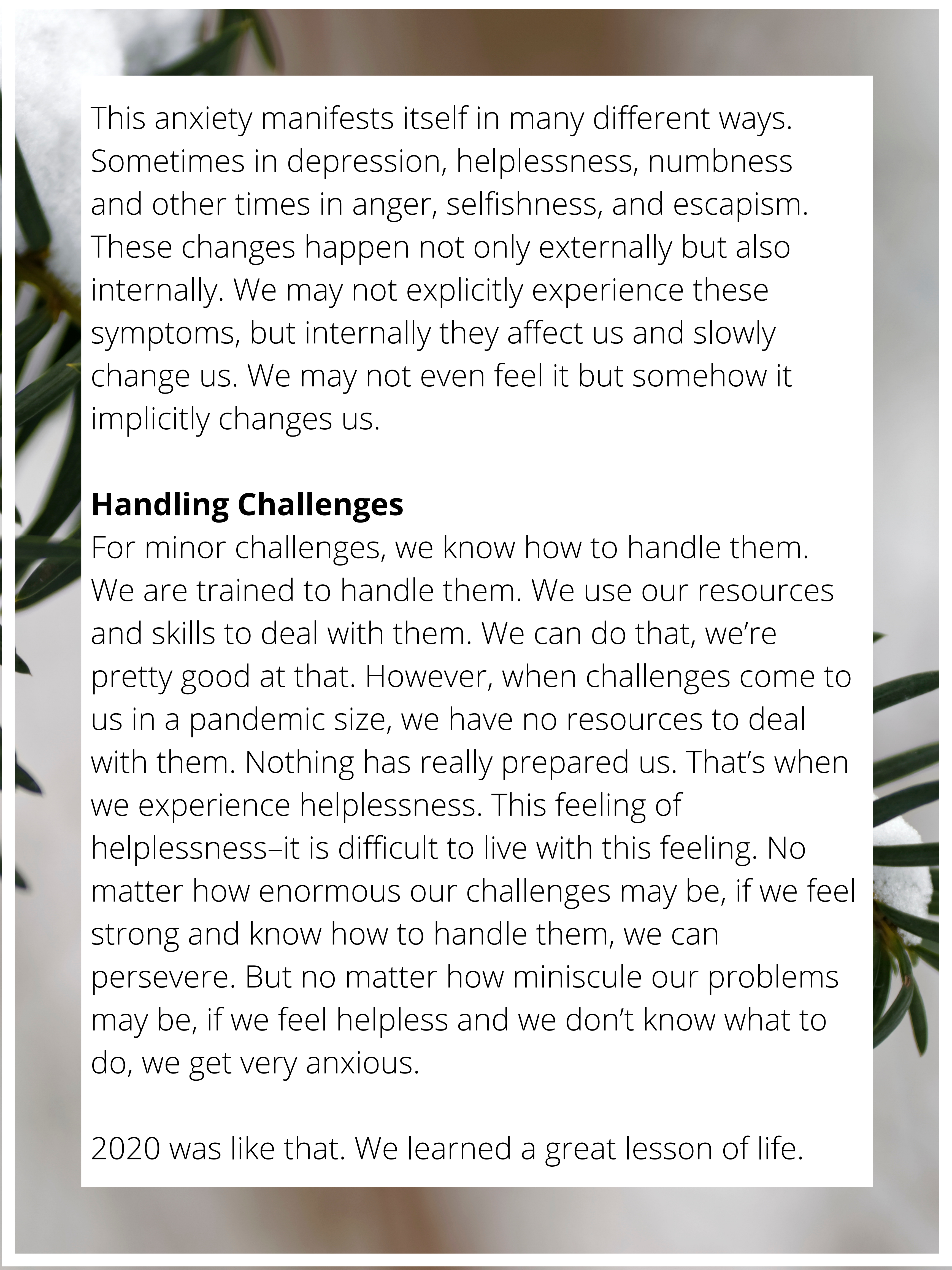


they are, the more we feel anxious about losing them.

You know, any changes in life give us stress. Whether they are big or small, or whether they are good changes or bad changes. Sometimes we think that only bad changes give us stress. That's not true. All kinds of changes give us stress; small, big, good, or bad. For example, changing your job, moving, perceiving bodily change, problems in the relationships, losing your loved ones—all these things give us stress.

But what we are experiencing right now is not a minor change but a change the entire world is experiencing. From yesterday, Ontario goes into lockdown. In Britain, they found a new variant of the virus so they've stopped all the travel from Britain. But yesterday, I heard that even in France they found a new variant. And even today in Ontario, there's a new variant of this virus in Durham.

We experience these changes every day and they are not insignificant changes but life-threatening changes. They give us tremendous stress and create existential anxiety within us.

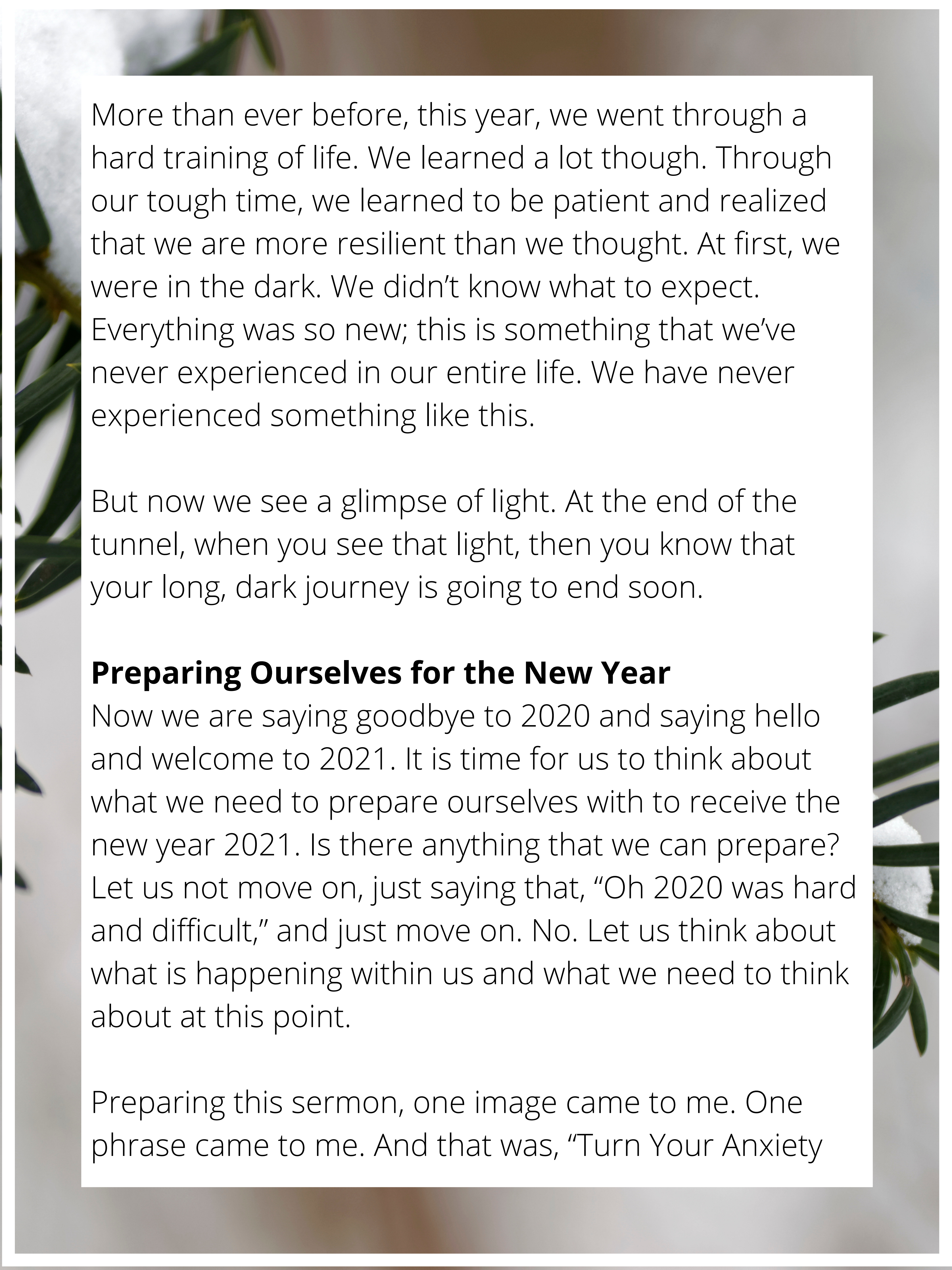


This anxiety manifests itself in many different ways. Sometimes in depression, helplessness, numbness and other times in anger, selfishness, and escapism. These changes happen not only externally but also internally. We may not explicitly experience these symptoms, but internally they affect us and slowly change us. We may not even feel it but somehow it implicitly changes us.

Handling Challenges

For minor challenges, we know how to handle them. We are trained to handle them. We use our resources and skills to deal with them. We can do that, we're pretty good at that. However, when challenges come to us in a pandemic size, we have no resources to deal with them. Nothing has really prepared us. That's when we experience helplessness. This feeling of helplessness—it is difficult to live with this feeling. No matter how enormous our challenges may be, if we feel strong and know how to handle them, we can persevere. But no matter how miniscule our problems may be, if we feel helpless and we don't know what to do, we get very anxious.

2020 was like that. We learned a great lesson of life.



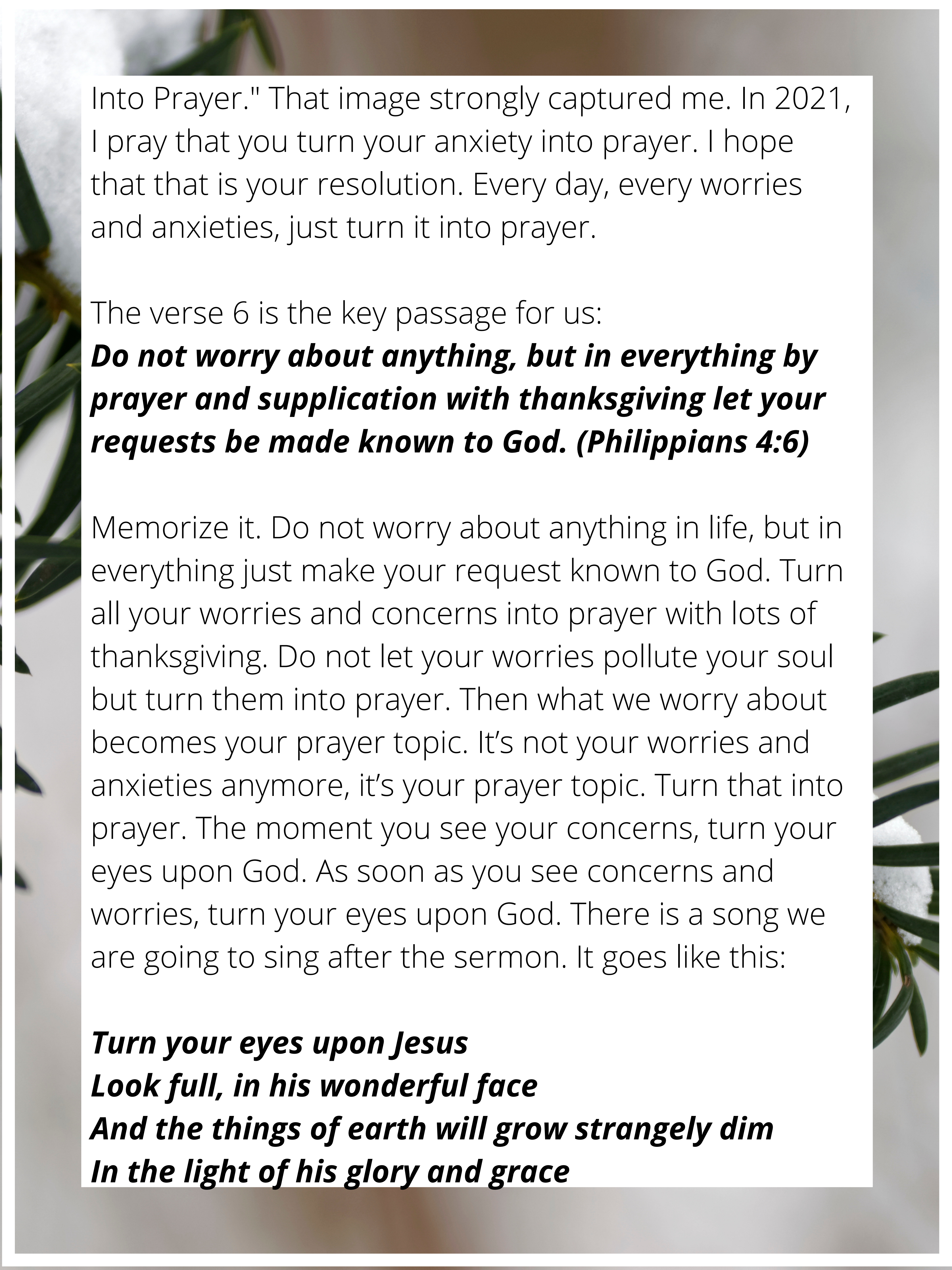
More than ever before, this year, we went through a hard training of life. We learned a lot though. Through our tough time, we learned to be patient and realized that we are more resilient than we thought. At first, we were in the dark. We didn't know what to expect. Everything was so new; this is something that we've never experienced in our entire life. We have never experienced something like this.

But now we see a glimpse of light. At the end of the tunnel, when you see that light, then you know that your long, dark journey is going to end soon.

Preparing Ourselves for the New Year

Now we are saying goodbye to 2020 and saying hello and welcome to 2021. It is time for us to think about what we need to prepare ourselves with to receive the new year 2021. Is there anything that we can prepare? Let us not move on, just saying that, "Oh 2020 was hard and difficult," and just move on. No. Let us think about what is happening within us and what we need to think about at this point.

Preparing this sermon, one image came to me. One phrase came to me. And that was, "Turn Your Anxiety



Into Prayer." That image strongly captured me. In 2021, I pray that you turn your anxiety into prayer. I hope that that is your resolution. Every day, every worries and anxieties, just turn it into prayer.

The verse 6 is the key passage for us:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Memorize it. Do not worry about anything in life, but in everything just make your request known to God. Turn all your worries and concerns into prayer with lots of thanksgiving. Do not let your worries pollute your soul but turn them into prayer. Then what we worry about becomes your prayer topic. It's not your worries and anxieties anymore, it's your prayer topic. Turn that into prayer. The moment you see your concerns, turn your eyes upon God. As soon as you see concerns and worries, turn your eyes upon God. There is a song we are going to sing after the sermon. It goes like this:

***Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full, in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace***

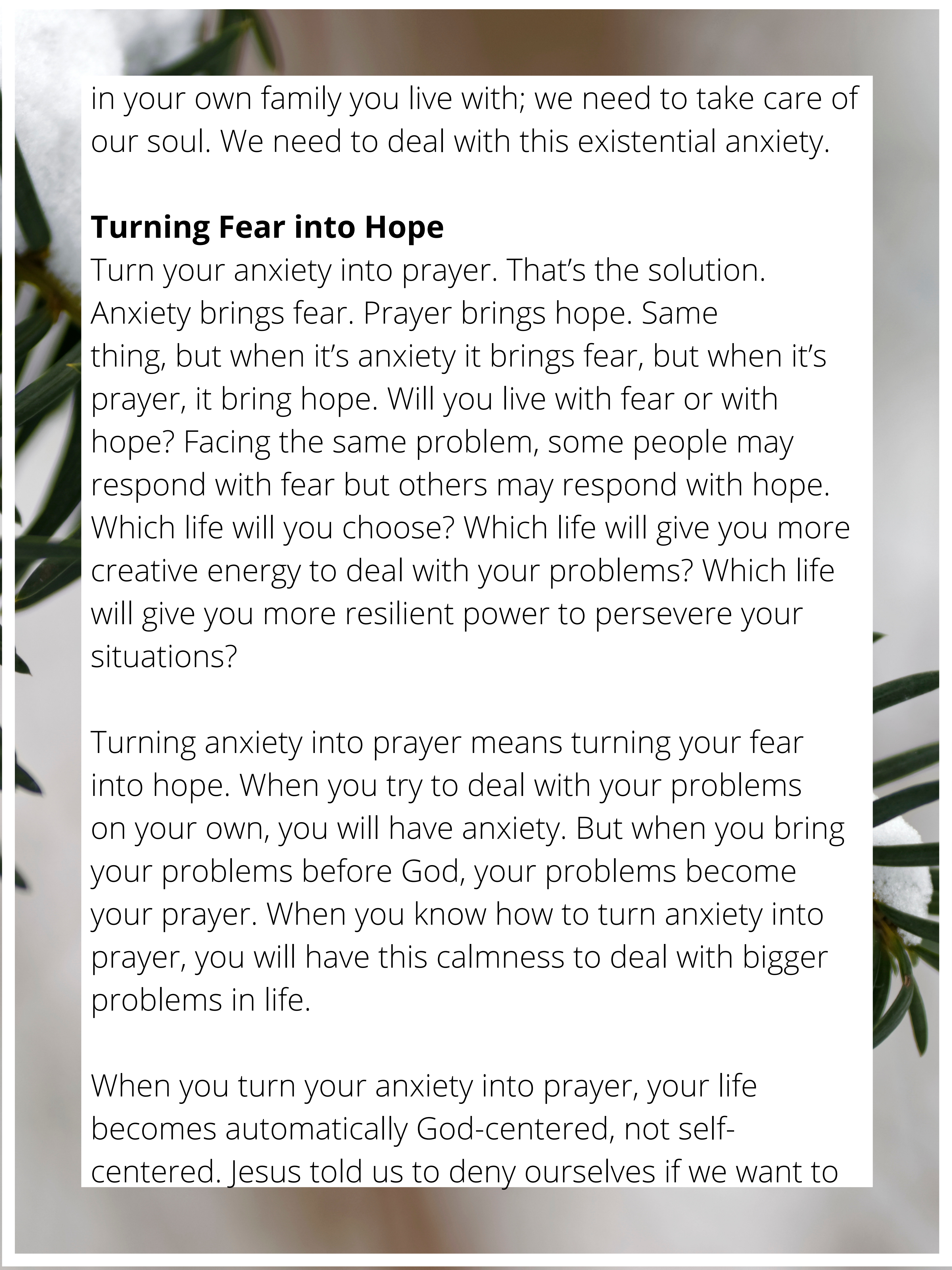
Don't make your worries big. Don't let that light flourish. Let it be dim. The light of your worries will die down.

Dealing with our Existential Anxiety

Just being careful is not the only way to overcome this pandemic. Of course, yes, we have to be careful. We should learn about this virus and yes, be careful not to do reckless things, like having a party and stuff like that. But that is not everything.

Rachel Walpert Fairbrother, a resident psychologist at Pine Integrated Health Centre, said, ***“When we feel anxious, we are more inclined to seek information in hopes that the more we learn, the less anxiety we will feel. In reality, the opposite effect often happens. The more we learn or hear about COVID-19, the more overwhelmed we may feel due to the sheer amount and variance of information available.”***

Yes, that's so true. If you're glued to the news, of course we need to be informed, but when you're glued to the news maybe your anxiety level may go up. Not only do we have to deal with this virus externally but also we need to deal with the damage that this virus has caused internally. Not only do we need to wear masks, keep a social distance, wash our hands, and keep the bubble



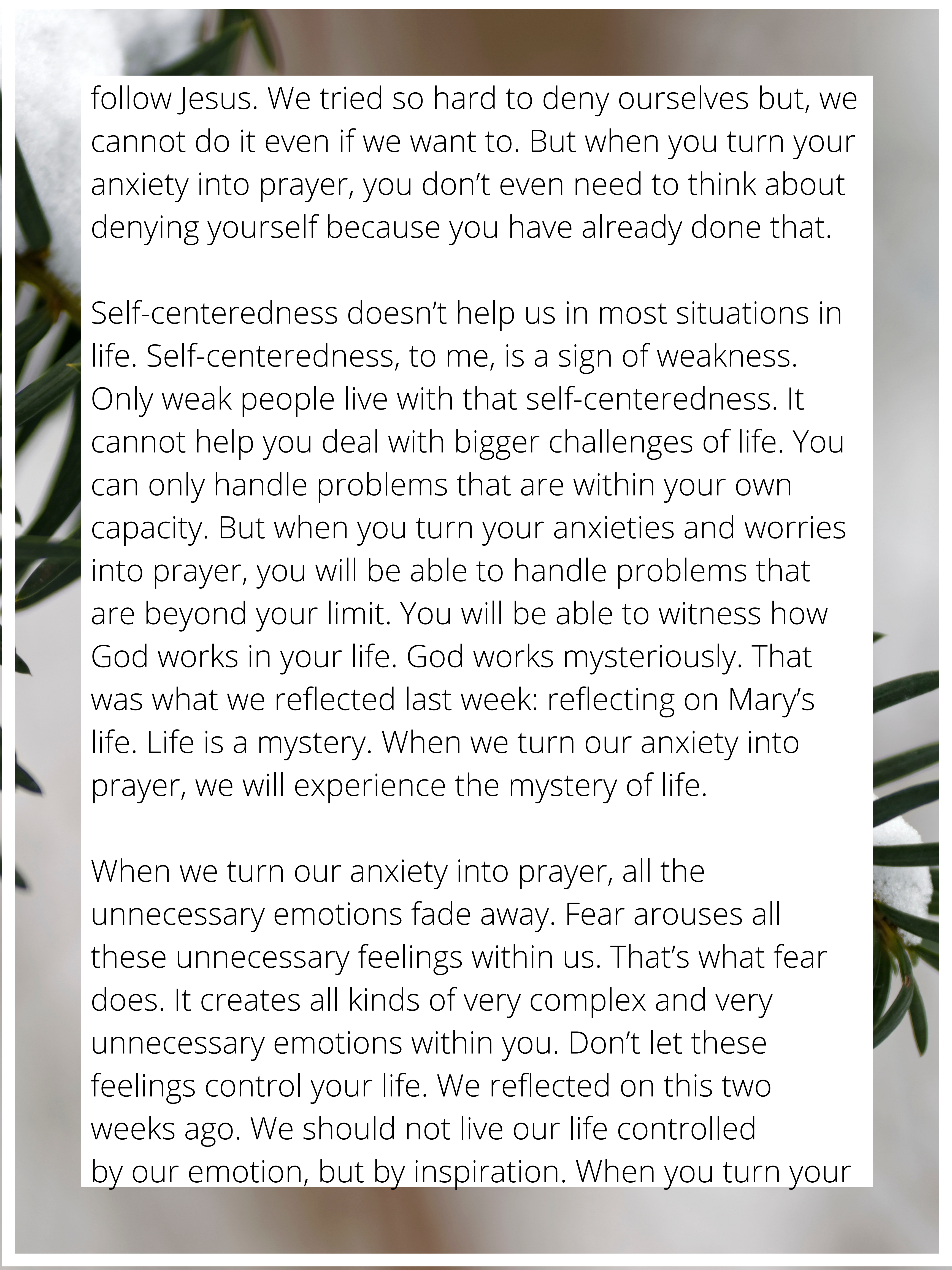
in your own family you live with; we need to take care of our soul. We need to deal with this existential anxiety.

Turning Fear into Hope

Turn your anxiety into prayer. That's the solution. Anxiety brings fear. Prayer brings hope. Same thing, but when it's anxiety it brings fear, but when it's prayer, it bring hope. Will you live with fear or with hope? Facing the same problem, some people may respond with fear but others may respond with hope. Which life will you choose? Which life will give you more creative energy to deal with your problems? Which life will give you more resilient power to persevere your situations?

Turning anxiety into prayer means turning your fear into hope. When you try to deal with your problems on your own, you will have anxiety. But when you bring your problems before God, your problems become your prayer. When you know how to turn anxiety into prayer, you will have this calmness to deal with bigger problems in life.

When you turn your anxiety into prayer, your life becomes automatically God-centered, not self-centered. Jesus told us to deny ourselves if we want to



follow Jesus. We tried so hard to deny ourselves but, we cannot do it even if we want to. But when you turn your anxiety into prayer, you don't even need to think about denying yourself because you have already done that.

Self-centeredness doesn't help us in most situations in life. Self-centeredness, to me, is a sign of weakness. Only weak people live with that self-centeredness. It cannot help you deal with bigger challenges of life. You can only handle problems that are within your own capacity. But when you turn your anxieties and worries into prayer, you will be able to handle problems that are beyond your limit. You will be able to witness how God works in your life. God works mysteriously. That was what we reflected last week: reflecting on Mary's life. Life is a mystery. When we turn our anxiety into prayer, we will experience the mystery of life.

When we turn our anxiety into prayer, all the unnecessary emotions fade away. Fear arouses all these unnecessary feelings within us. That's what fear does. It creates all kinds of very complex and very unnecessary emotions within you. Don't let these feelings control your life. We reflected on this two weeks ago. We should not live our life controlled by our emotion, but by inspiration. When you turn your



anxiety into prayer, unnecessary emotions will dissipate, and inspiration will fill your heart.

Now Christmas is over. All the bright lights are gone. You won't be able to see them on the streets anymore. We will face January and February, which are long and gloomy months. So many students commit suicide in February. That's why they have a study week in February, to give them a break.

But if you know how to turn anxiety into prayer, you will be okay. You will be okay. You will persevere. You will come out stronger and bigger. And that is the secret of life. So make that a habit of your life. As soon as you worry about something, just turn it into prayer. Then you will be able to come out fine.