The Soul’s Medicine During a Global Pandemic

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Preacher: Erik Raymond

[0:00] Now is the time for the reading and preaching of God's Word, and it's my joy and honor to introduce my friend Eric Raymond. Eric is quite an accomplished pastor.

He's authored several books, including one entitled Chasing Contentment, Trusting God in a Discontented Age. And he writes regularly for blogs and websites that I follow, like Nine Marks, Gospel Coalition.
He has a blog entitled Ordinary Pastor that's hosted by the Gospel Coalition website. He is actually a Massachusetts native but moved to Nebraska because he was with the Air Force and came back to serve as the lead pastor of Redeemer Fellowship Church in Watertown.
I don't know how he finds the time for all the stuff he does, especially with six children, right? Undoubtedly, he has an excellent helper in his wife, Christy, who's also here with him.
It's an honor to meet you, and I'm glad that you guys could all join us. But more than any of those things that I've just mentioned, what impresses me the most about Eric is he's a faithful pastor.
[1:13] He's a faithful, humble, local church pastor, as you can tell from his blog title, Ordinary Pastor. And he's brought together a group of pastors in the area, and we're calling it the Charles River Pastors Network.

And with his leadership, that's been outside of our local church leadership team. That's been the single most encouraging group that I've been a part of, extra local, but in this area. So I'm really grateful for his leadership in that and for his example.
And so I'm really excited for you guys to meet him, to hear from him. I'm really excited to hear from you, Mike. So thank you, Eric. Please come up and preach for us. Thank you. Well, thank you very much, Sean.
It's certainly a privilege to be with you guys tonight. Thank you for the opportunity, and we rejoice with you at the birth of your new baby. We're grateful to God for his blessing.
And I just want to, on behalf of Redeemer Fellowship Church in Watertown, just want to say we are grateful for you and your witness as a church. We pray for you guys regularly. And we're just so thankful for the fellowship in the gospel that we have together as brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ.
[2:37] Let's go ahead and turn in our Bibles to Psalm 94, the 94th Psalm. And this will be the scripture reading for tonight. I want to read the whole Psalm, and we're going to focus on one verse mainly tonight, and that is verse 19.

So if you go ahead and turn to Psalm 94. I want to read the whole Psalm, and then pray, and then we'll consider God's word together. Let's hear God's word.
O Lord, God of vengeance. O God of vengeance, shine forth. Rise up, O judge of the earth. Repay to the proud what they deserve.
O Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? They pour out their arrogant words. All the evildoers boast. They crush your people, O Lord, and afflict your heritage.
They kill the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless. And they say, the Lord does not see. The God of Jacob does not perceive. Understand, O dullest of the people.
[3:45] Fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see? He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke?

He who teaches man knowledge, the Lord knows the thoughts of man. They are but a breath.
Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law, to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.
For the Lord will not forsake his people. He will not abandon his heritage. For justice will return to the righteous, and all the upright in heart will follow it. Who rises up for me against the wicked?

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Who stands up for me against evildoers? If the Lord had not been my help, my soul would have soon lived in the land of silence. When I thought, my foot slips, your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.
When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul. Can wicked rulers be allied with you, those who frame injustice by statute?
[4:53] They band together against the life of the righteous and condemn the innocent to death. But the Lord has become my stronghold, and my God, the rock of my refuge.

He will bring back on them their iniquity and wipe them out for their wickedness. The Lord, our God, will wipe them out. This is the word of God.
Let's pray. Our Father, it is our prayer tonight that you would take the reading of this word and bless it to our ears, and to our hearts, and to our lives.
Help us now, we pray, to hear this word, hear the scriptures, for they are life to us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. As I mentioned, I want to focus on verse 19.
What we have in this verse here is an abundance of cares and sufficient consolation from God.
[5:58] We have a psalm here where the psalmist is enduring some season of difficulty. We're not sure precisely what it is. It doesn't lay it out for us.

But we can be sure that the opposition was directed at him personally and in large part because of his faith in God. That's this contrast between the wicked and the righteous.
And really, what's helpful about this psalm is that the precise circumstances are not important for us to nail down, to take application from it. But rather, we can see how God helps him amid his difficulty.
And what we'll see tonight, really as our main point, is that God consoles his children amidst swelling concerns. God consoles his children amidst their swelling concerns.
And we see it in verse 19. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.
So it's really three progressions for us in seasons of uncertainty.
[7:03] And these progressions begin with the problem. The overwhelming concerns. The prescription, divine consolations. And the prognosis, personal contentment.

So we'll see those three tonight. First, the problem, overwhelming concerns. We see in verse 19, he says, when the cares of my heart are many, this word that's rendered cares could be worries.
So he could be saying, the worries of my heart are many. Or the anxious thoughts of my heart are many. You get the idea. It's what's heavy upon his mind.
It's what he wakes up thinking about. What he goes to bed thinking about. What occupies his mind as his brain goes into neutral. It's a disquieting concern that he can't get off of his mind.
And for the psalmist, likely there's some degree of personal attacks that he's dealing with. But really, what issue he's facing that really exacerbates the problem is not primarily the issue that he's facing with people, but rather the issue that he perceives that God is not doing anything about it.
[8:14] What really seems to vex him is that he wants to see God act in the midst of it. And the lack of action, according to his perception, causes him to be discouraged and even have anxiety multiplied.

And that's what ends up tying him in knots. We see in the first seven verses where he's making the case for God to act. He's petitioning God. He's calling him a God of vengeance. And he's asking him to judge and to deal with those who are proud.
In verses one through three, he's basically saying, God, you're a judge who punishes those who do wrong. And in then verses four through seven, he's laying out the case for them and their need for punishment.
He's talking about arrogant words, evildoers, crushing the people, afflicting your heritage. They're attacking those who you love. They kill the widow. They murder the fatherless.
And they even mock God to say that the God of Jacob does not see. This is brutal stuff. The psalmist's question is, why isn't God doing anything?
[9:25] There's many concerns. Notice even the plural. When the cares of my heart are many. Multiple cares, many. Swelling concerns. I wonder if you can relate to the psalmist.

Many concerns. Do you have any concerns? Perhaps a concern to go with every hour or every minute of the day. Swelling concerns, like bees buzzing around the head. Insects that won't leave you alone.

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These concerns that just seem to weigh on you. Do you find it difficult to collect your thoughts and process through burdens? Do you have any concerns tonight? Do you have anxieties and fears? Kind of expanding fears, expanding anxieties, crowding together. Very difficult to subdue and rule them. They just dominate. We know really across the world right now, with COVID-19, there's swelling fears.
Constant concerns. There's a spread of a virus. There's health for yourself and for others. We're constantly hit with numbers of cases and deaths, spread, rates, hospitalizations.
[10:38] We're always reminded of the stats. And even the news anchors and the news articles and the websites just seem to, if you might be not having an anxious day, seem to just throw gasoline on the fire and cause it even to fan into a flame of more anxiety and more concern.

There's economic impact of the virus. There's political concerns as a result of it. There's anxiety multiplying throughout our time. That's just one issue that happens to be served up to us right now that causes a collective, global swelling of concerns.
But then even in our lives, I've been in pastoral ministry to know that in most churches, there's relationship issues even within the church and within extended family and friends in workplace. There's relationship burdens that we have. We have friends that have suffered. We have friendships that have suffered. We have people that have died. Some have died in the midst of this COVID time.
And it's very difficult for people to grieve and say goodbye to family and loved ones. There's wayward children who grow up believing and then walk away from the faith. Then there's personal concerns.
[11:48] Your future, school, work, marriage, where the church is going to meet. When is it going to go back to normal? All of the things that we want.

These swelling concerns that come up. And then personal depression, anxiety, bitterness over the past, uncertainty over the future. And then there's the spiritual concern. Guilt over personal sin. What do I do with my sin? Is God angry? What about these evil thoughts in my mind or impure thoughts that circle through the mind like gnats? Or anger or frustration or doubts about God? Or feeling personally far from God like God is withdrawn? Hard time reconciling what's going on in the world with what we read in the Bible. These are just examples of swelling concerns that could fill out our personal prayer list before the Lord.
And as of yet, we're not intending to solve the problem. We're just trying to show the commonness of swelling concerns at this point. When the concerns of our heart are many, what do we do?
[12:51] Well, that's the problem. Overwhelming concerns. Now, what do we do about it? That's the prescription. The verse says, when the cares of my heart are many, the overwhelming concerns, what is the prescription?

It is divine consolations or sacred care. This is the prescription. If you have swelling concerns, according to the psalmist, it's divine consolations. We need God to care for us.
We're intended to see the medicine that handles the sickness. You see how it's side by side in verse 19. Cares of my heart, your consolations. Many cares, many consolations.
It's as if there is a consolation in God for every one of our swelling concerns. This is an outstanding statement. It's a bold statement that God is able to console the cares of every one of his children. Well, think about this. The psalmist is endeavoring in this psalm to understand his circumstances in light of God's character.
[14:02] See, this is a problem we face often. So often when we get into this analysis of swelling concerns, we're dealing with the concerns of our circumstances or things that are in our mind, we look through the lens of our circumstance and we see God's character.

And we say, based upon what I'm dealing with, God must be like this. So for example, if things are difficult, we might feel like God doesn't love us because we expect things to be easy.
So through our circumstances, we look at God's character. But the Bible teaches us to look a different way. Instead of looking at our circumstances and making judgment upon God's character, we're to look at God's character and then judge our circumstances.
So we should evaluate our circumstances in light of the character of God and not the other way around. Because when we do that, we're always going to have trouble. And that's what the psalmist teaches us here in the psalm.

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He goes to God as the source of His consolations, His character. And what are some things that we see about God? Well, in general, just in thinking about dealing with concerns, we need to be reminded of the fact that God is sovereign.
[15:14] God is in control. The coronavirus may have caught the World Health Organization by surprise, the CDC, the President of the United States, and many of us, but it didn't catch God by surprise.

He's sovereign over everything. He's in absolute control. Psalm 115, verse 3, Our God is in the heavens. He does whatever He pleases.
Isaiah 46.10, He declares the end from the beginning. From ancient times to things not done, saying, My counsel shall stand. I will accomplish my good purpose.
But not only is God sovereign, but He's also good. I'm sure you see the need for God to be good as well as sovereign. If He was just sovereign, He might be a malevolent dictator.
But He's sovereign and it's paired with His goodness. So His all power is combined with His all goodness. Psalm 119, verse 68 says, You are good and you do good.
[16:14] Teach me your statutes. For you, O Lord, Psalm 86.5, are good and forgiving. O give thanks to the Lord for He is good. Psalm 107, verse 1.

He's good and He's sovereign. He's also faithful. He keeps His word. If He makes a promise to you, you can take it to the bank. You can trust it. You can cling to it.
Like an oak that will not be moved, God is trustworthy. Psalm 25, 8, 9. Good and upright is the Lord. Therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right. We know the verse, Romans 8, 28, which says, We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to His purpose. So God is a God who cares. He's sovereign. He's good.
He's faithful. And we need to remember these things when we are dealing with swelling concerns. And that's what we end up seeing from the text is that the psalmist, in the midst of his pleading to God, he finds himself instructed and he's grabbing a hold of God's character.
[17:21] And what he's clinging to is God's word, His work and His worth, who God is. And he makes it very personal. Did you notice when we read that how many personal pronouns he used?

He's dealing with himself and the Lord. Look at verses 16-19. Who rises up for me against the wicked? Who stands up for me against the evildoers? If the Lord had not been my help, my soul would have lived in the land of silence.
When I thought, my foot slips, your steadfast love held me up. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul. Verse 22, but the Lord has become my refuge and the rock of my refuge, my stronghold.
So we see that God's care, His goodness to His people. And He does it in surprising ways. These might be not ways that you would think about God caring for His people, but it is in fact what the psalmist grabs onto.
In verse 12, He says, blessed is the man whom you discipline. An evidence of God's care for His people is discipline. I'm sure you can think of a passage in the New Testament that teaches this, Hebrews chapter 12, that teaches us that God loves His children and He disciplines us.
[18:37] One of the ways that shows that He actually cares for us is He doesn't let us ruin our lives and the life of everybody else. He cares for us and disciplines us like a loving and faithful father. And that's what the psalmist is grabbing onto.

Blessed is the man whom you discipline, even Himself. And then He teaches us. Verse 12, the second half of it, He teaches us out of His law. He teaches us from the Scriptures.
These are good gifts of God. These consolations of God. Verse 13, He gives rest in the days of trouble. Those who are weary and heavy laden, He gives rest for their souls.
Here in anticipation through the pages of Scripture, but ultimately in Jesus Christ He gives us rest. He's also faithful. Verse 14, you will not forsake His people. This is the consolation as He's dealing with this swelling concern.
He's reminding Himself, God loves me. He disciplines me because I am a son. He teaches me His law. He gives me rest. He's faithful. He will not forsake me.
[19:39] Even verse 15, justice will return to the righteous. He will vindicate you. He's reminded that God's going to care for His people and absolutely vindicate Him.

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Verse 16, He defends His people. Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who stands up for me against evildoers? The answer is God. God will do this. See how He's consoling Himself upon God.
It's as if His soul is restless, but He's laying upon the pillow of God's character and He's being consoled and saying, this is who God is. this is what I need to remember.
He's being brought back to health through His contemplation of God. Verse 17, If the Lord had not been my help, my soul would have lived in the land of silence. He's reminding Himself that God has helped him.
Has God helped you? Has God been your defense? Has God proven His faithfulness to you? Has God given you rest? Has He taught you from His Word?
[20:40] Has He disciplined you? Then verse 18, He's the sustainer. When I thought my foot slips, your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up. We're basically like, we're like toddlers walking on ice.

And God is like the loving Father with His arms underneath our arms helping us to move. We'll make a hash of everything. But God is faithful. And He's being reminded that I didn't slip not because I'm so good, but because God is so good.
And because He's so faithful. The consolations of God are cheering His soul. And then verse 19, He's the consoler. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.
They console like a crying baby that's been consoled and cared for by her mother. That is the psalmist. And even further, you have God's character.
He's no ally of the wicked. He will never partner with lawless. It says in verse 20, the wicked rulers cannot be allied with you. He's a refuge for His people. Verse 22, the Lord has become my stronghold and the refuge.
[21:50] My refuge. And He's the judge. He is going to vindicate His character. Verse 23, He will bring back on them their iniquity. He will wipe them out for their wickedness. There are limitations to human justice, but there is no limitation to divine justice.

Everyone will stand before Almighty God, the judge, and give an account. You can take it to the bank. He will vindicate His righteousness and judgment. You may not see them judged in this life, but you will see them judged in the age to come.
And that should console you when you see evil people, wicked people, people who do great harm to people, oppressed and injustice and hurt people, go through life and seemingly get off scot-free. They don't get off scot-free. They will stand before an Almighty judge and that consoles the psalmist. It's not that God has forgotten. It's that God is forbearing.
And there is a time coming when He will judge everyone. And that reminds them that God is good. So you have the blessing of divine care for Him individually. You have the blessing of God's character.
[22:55] And so in the midst of this whole season where He's working through this difficulty, He's reminded that the preciousness of God's consolations is not in the absence of difficulty but in the promises of God.

See, listen, we oftentimes think that if things are difficult, that means that God is angry. Or if things are hard, that means things are not going the way they should be going.
That's because we like things to go easy and we want things to be comfortable. But we just have to look at the Lord Jesus Christ and know that that's not the way it works even for the faithful. Oftentimes, difficulty comes to us for the purpose of strengthening us and making us more like Christ. To endure suffering well. The psalmist would not have known God's consolations if he had not felt the provocations around him and the roaring sea within.
He's brought to be consoled by God because his soul is disquieted in the midst of difficulty. In other words, your comfort in this world is not primarily an easy path but a faithful God.
[24:10] Your consolation is God himself, not an easy life. If you're equating God's love for you with the absence of difficulty, you end up distorting what the Bible says about God and what it says about us.

And if we do so, even subtly, we are nibbling at the hook of the prosperity gospel which teaches that this life is all about our personal prosperity and if we don't experience that, there's something wrong with God or us.
That's a lie from hell. Look at Jesus and see what he went through. We know that he was the most faithful man who ever lives. Think of the hymn, Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed, for I

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am thy God and will still give thee aid.
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.
He's with us in the midst of it.
It wasn't ease that made him smile, but God's preciousness to him. Remember Herod in Acts chapter 12, he was scared sitting on his throne, but the apostle Paul and Silas were singing in prison.
[25:25] On the one hand, Herod had a guilty conscience and he was terrified. Paul and Silas had a clean conscience and they were rejoicing.

It's all about your respect to God one way or the other. So what are some practical examples? Let's just think about this. How do you practically do this? How do you take this medicine on the day-to-day?
How do you do that? We don't want to let anxiety or fear live rent-free in our head where we're just constantly going in this place of anxiety and fear and this constant swelling concerns of our hearts.
We want to be the landlord of our mind. We want to take every thought captive as 2 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 5 says in obedience to Christ. Take every example you can think of and take it in obedience to Christ.
Is there suffering? Take it into obedience with Christ. Think of this the whole COVID crisis. What is the root concern that everybody has?
[26:30] The root concern is not contracting the virus. The root concern why people are freaking out and so upset is people are scared to die. That's the issue.

We're scared to die as a people. That's enslavement to a fear of death. Hebrews chapter 2 tells us that in verses 14 through 18. But the reality is for the Christian he says that he has freed us from slavery to a fear of death through Jesus Christ.
Or anxiety about the future. We trust in God who's in control. Jesus tells his followers in Matthew chapter 6 basically take a walk and look at the birds. see them neither laboring or toiling but they're fed.
God knows how to take care of the birds. He can take care of you. Is it grief or sadness? Remember that this God according to Psalm 56 verse 8 he puts our tears in his bottle.
He doesn't have a literal bottle where he catches our tears but it's a way of communicating that God is near to you in the midst of your sorrow gathering up your tears. He loves you and cares for you. This is our God.
[27:41] Is it doubt over your own acceptance with God? Is that the cause of the anxiety? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Have you trusted in him? Is he your Savior and Lord? Then he's yours. He's your Lord. He's your Savior. If you trusted in him if you turned from your sin your sin is gone.
And listen to Romans 8 trying to nail this down for us verses 31 through 34 what shall we say to these things? If God is for us who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he also not with him graciously give us all things?
Who will bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who's there to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that who was raised? Who is at the right hand interceding for us?
As the hymn writer says that soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose I will not I will not desert to his foes. That soul though all hell should endeavor to shake I will never no never no never forsake.
[28:47] That soul that leans upon Christ will never forsake. So isolate the source fear that is causing the raging concerns and take the proper medicine the divine consolation find your rest in God.

And then we see the results the prognosis personal contentment. You see swelling concerns you see divine consolations and then finally personal contentment.
What I think is so interesting here is that most of our concerns that you and I have are external to us. We worry about all kinds of things of natural life and that's fine that's right God cares about these things but the solution to dealing with most of our concerns is internal.
God works from the inside out. The medicine is applied to the heart the soul. It's the storm on the inside that needs quieting first before the outside.
Just like the sea of Galilee Jesus speaks a word of peace to our hearts. You see the phrase in verse 19 when the cares of my heart are many your consolations cheer my soul.

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[29:58] This word cheer means to delight or have pleasure. It expresses refreshment and satisfaction it's another word for contentment. It's even used in Isaiah 66 12 to describe the care that a mother provides to a restless child.

Listen to Isaiah 66 12 and 13 For thus says the Lord Behold I will extend peace to her that is his people like a river in the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream and you shall nurse and you shall be carried upon her hip and bounced on her knee that is the word cheered bounced upon her knees as one whom the mother comforts so I will comfort you you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. This is how God deals with his people. In the midst of swelling concerns the divine consolations cheer the soul like a baby's crying eyes go to laughing on the mother's bouncing knee.
The look of affirmation love care acceptance providing love and just being close to one's mother takes the swelling concerns to cheer and that's what Isaiah is saying look at a mother console her child and see that's how God's consolations cheer his people.
This is how God deals with us. This is superior comfort to our issues. See food may nourish the body wine can cheer the heart music soothes the ear art can captivate the eyes sleep refreshes the body but the only thing that consoles the heart and soul is the consolation of God.
[31:35] That's the only thing that ultimately brings rest. And you know if we think about the Lord Jesus Christ we could see him in the midst of this verse when the cares of his heart were many your consolations cheered his soul.

Do you remember Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane? There when he told his disciples to pray and he goes and he said his soul was distressed and dispirited to the point of death and he fell upon the ground and he pleaded with his father pleading with him to take the cup of wrath which was going to be the judgment upon our sin which he was going to bear.
He said if it is your will will you allow this cup to pass for me? Nevertheless not my will but your will be done. In the midst of great agony in the garden Jesus is faced with the agony of the cup but his consolation is ultimately in the will of God and nevertheless not my will but your will be done.
He rests in God's will in his character as the swelling concerns of his heart were many he was cheered even by the will of God and that's what we end up reading in verses 1 and 2 of Hebrew. Look to the Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despised the shame and is seated at the right hand of God. Jesus is the model of being consoled by God and the joy set before him.
[33:03] He's also the motivation for us to live in that way. We look at Jesus the one who lived for us died for us and was raised on the third day and we see him in the way that he bore up under such anguish and we're reminded that God cares for us because of what Christ has done and we find ourselves clinging to him.

He is the consoler for the weary soul. We find our rest in him. We can be content in God because he supplies our need. So in the midst of a pandemic of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty the soul's medicine is God himself.
His consolations cheer our soul. So I trust that today and this week in the midst of constant alerts, bad news, difficult phone calls, tough conversations, personal, spiritual, relational, physical issues, that your reflex is going to be to worry and to be filled with anxiety and just march and step with everyone else that's filled with anxiety.
But I trust that you may remember by God's grace the kindness of the Holy Spirit if you be reminded of this verse that when the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.
Your soul can be cheered by divine consolations. May God be pleased to make that so this week for all of us. Let's pray. Let's pray. Our Father, we are very needy people and we thank you that our neediness finds your sufficiency.
[34:56] Everything we need and we lack you have provided for us in Christ. Christ. And so we thank you for your wonderful grace, your patience, and your mercy.

And we do pray that in the midst of this time in particular that we would find ourselves resting upon you and your consolations, your character and your commitment to your people.
Forgive us for the ways in which we turn away and we reflect the old nature and demonstrate an unbelief and a lack of faith. We pray that we would wear out a new path, one that goes back to Christ and we find our rest in Him, the one who is gentle and lowly and humble and welcomes us with a light burden and a yoke that is easy to give rest for our souls.

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I pray that we would rejoice in our Lord Jesus Christ and we would cling to your Word. And I pray, Lord, for this church, Trinity Cambridge, that you would use the people of this church to be an encouragement to one another, to remind one another, to speak the truth and love, reminding each other of the divine consolations, to cheer the souls in the midst of swelling concerns.
And I pray for a faithful witness to those outside of Christ in the church to speak the good word of the gospel where one might find hope and peace in the midst of their own swelling concerns.
[36:19] Thank you for your sufficiency in the midst of our weakness. Thank you for your love in the midst of our great need. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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