This season was marked by a lot of fear and anxiety for me from the very beginning. I had a lot of things going on in my mind before the season started that made me feel this way. In my senior year of high school, I did not have a good cross country season because I put a lot of pressure on myself knowing that that was my last year of running in high school. That pressure broke me and caused me to psych myself out before every race. Also, with the traumatic event that happened to me after last year’s conference race, I felt a lot of anxiety in racing that I had never before. I didn’t want either of these things to happen to me again, and so I would worry that I was somehow going to get trapped in one of those positions. Like I mentioned a few months ago, I would have trouble sleeping the night before races and my heart would beat really loudly and strongly throughout the night. I was always of afraid of the “what if” and this put me in a place of bondage in my running. About the time that I told all of you that I was having such a hard time sleeping and experiencing anxiety, I felt like my world as it pertained to running was falling apart. Whenever I thought about racing, I felt like a crushing weight was placed on me that I could not lift. The fear that I felt was crippling and I felt like I was drowning in a sea of my own thoughts and worries. I would get nervous a few nights before the race and start to have difficulty sleeping then too. I was afraid of bedtime because of what restless thoughts might be in store for me that night. I felt like I couldn’t break that cycle of stress and I was devastated and defeated. Just when I started to feel this way, though, I realized that I was right. I couldn’t escape this trapped feeling on my own. I needed God to bring me up and out of that place of darkness. This realization immediately made me feel a lot more at ease. Even though I felt better, though, I wasn’t sure exactly how I would be able to feel the effects of God’s hand upon me. I always knew that God was with me, but sometimes I found it hard to believe. I would cry out to Him in the midst of a restless night, but feel alone still. Then I understood that I wasn’t alone at all; but rather, that God was right next to me the whole time. I was too focused on my own fear and worry that I didn’t look up to see that God was standing right in front of me. I never knew what it would look like for me to let go of my worry, but I began to loosen the grip on my fears during this season and it was extremely freeing. Last night, I found a journal entry that I wrote on September 11 that helps show where I was at mentally during this process of letting go. (read prayer) I still struggled all the way through the end of the season with feelings of anxiety; however, something was different. I was more conscious of God’s love and protection over me than I had been in the past. Something that especially helped me was to think about how I was never racing alone, but with God right by my side. I knew that God had my best interest in mind, and so I could rest in the fact that, no matter the outcome of the race, it would be to His glory and purpose. Another thing that really helped me to calm down throughout the season was the thought of this being my senior year. In high school, this thought made me more stressed and worried; however, now, it makes me incredibly grateful. I have been reflecting a lot on cross country lately and how it has shaped me. I have learned so much, made so many amazing friends, and have had really awesome opportunities because of this sport. It has helped shape me into a hardworking, determined, and perseverant person. As we in this room all know very well, there is nothing like cross country racing. It is such a unique opportunity and experience. Thinking this way made me realize what a privilege it is to race and how much I will really miss it, even though it hurts so badly at times. This helped alleviate some stress for me because it reminded me why I do cross country-because I love it. Coach always says that racing is a joy and I don’t think that I ever truly understood what that meant until this year. I am so grateful that I have had the privilege to race for so many years and I am sad to think that in a few short months my racing days will be over. So, for now, I will do my best to make the most of every opportunity that God gives me and to run boldly in His name and with the confidence that He will be guiding my every step. I know that stress will come, but I feel so much more assured in God’s love that I feel that my old fears will not have as much power over me as they used to. It has been an uphill battle, but with God by my side, we are slowly winning it. I want to end with a verse that has been one of my favorites since high school; it’s 1 Peter 5:7: “Give all your worries to Him because he cares for you.”