

## God's Peace in Anxiety (Philippians 4:6-9)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton ([www.gcb.church](http://www.gcb.church))

This week at family camp we were blessed by great fun, fellowship, testimonies, and teaching.

- The theme for our speakers was God's hope and help in the challenges of life.
- Graeme preached on peace in conflict, go to your brother, and seek to be reconciled.
- There's a heart forgiveness and we also need to ask others 'will you forgive me for...'
- Kyle Dague preached on rejoicing in suffering, how we can be sorrowing yet rejoicing

Jesse led music that day, it was powerful, 2 dads who've lost children but not lost joy in God

- Kevin preached on contentment in lack (in all things) in Philippians 4 where I'll pick up
- It was so encouraging to hear from men on subjects I've seen God really growing them in
- I said at camp we'd complete our week's theme today looking at God's help in anxiety
- This is a subject I've seen God growing me in, but still need to since I studied it years ago

I invite you to turn to Phil 4 as our text covering these subjects to finish our family camp theme

- v. 10-13 are about contentment, doing all things through Christ, that's the context before
- Phil 4, v. 4 is the theme of rejoicing in the Lord always in v. 4, including suffering, v. 14
- v. 1-3 covers interpersonal peace in conflict, today's text covers internal peace in anxiety

Philippians 4:6–9: *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* <sup>7</sup> *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* <sup>8</sup> *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.* <sup>9</sup> *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

- So 'the peace of God' by prayer, and 'the God of peace' is with us by practicing this
- Many of us at camp saw and heard and learned things we need to put in practice, or apply
- We need to practice these things, think about these things, and pray about everything
- When our hearts and minds are anxious, God offers peace transcending comprehension

Some of the best minds and men and women in Bible times have struggled with being anxious:

- Solomon in Pr 12:25 said: *Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.*
- Mary mother of Jesus, most blessed among women, can relate to anxious moms: '*Son, why have You treated us this way?...Your father and I have been **anxiously looking for You***' (Lk 2:48 NAS)
- One of Jesus' closest most beloved friends was guilty of this in the midst of her stressed busyness serving: '*Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things...*' (Lk 10:41).

**What she and we need is the Lord, to talk to and learn from Him**

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was once a royal physician in the UK. He wrote how anxiety medically can be one of the most problematic things, but spiritually he explained this text 'is undoubtedly one of the noblest, greatest, and most comforting statements which is to be found anywhere... from the standpoint of our practical experience, nothing has greater comfort for God's people than these two verses... [v. 6-7. He explains anxiety as] nervous solicitude, tending to brood or ponder... meditate overmuch upon... morbid care... lying awake and you would have given the whole world if you could only sleep, if you could but stop the heart and... mind from going... But your mind would not let you sleep, your heart would not let you sleep... imagination comes in and you begin to think, 'What if this or that should happen?'... You go on thinking for hours, agitated by these imaginations... in that state we are useless... We may appear to be listening to [others] as they speak in conversation but our mind is chasing these possibilities..."

- The doctor diagnosed me pretty well! I need this study, and I know others here need this
  - Even if our weaknesses differ, even if you haven't struggled in this area like me recently
  - you will (future uncertainties, relational or personal difficulties, a difficult conversation)
  - Some of you are anxious about health, financial or physical issues, or unknown future
- Some of your anxieties are speaking to you even while I'm preaching to you*

In North America the Anxiety Center website reported 43% of people are on meds for anxiety.<sup>1</sup> Around the world, \$6.5 trillion dollars in direct costs for anxiety disorders is reported annually.

- Est. 30% of all costs for psychiatric disorders in the USA<sup>2</sup> (aka United States of Anxiety)

Phil 4:6-7 gives free biblical counseling for anxiety and a peace surpassing all understanding

- God offers better than drugs, He offers His love and peace to guard our hearts and minds
- God is aware of special needs or brain problems of anxiety (weakness, not a wickedness)<sup>3</sup>
- Not all anxious thoughts are sin (like fear), but it's sin to not obey v. 6 as anxieties come
- Even if the brain has problems or is prone to this, the Great Physician can help the mind
- Even if a health issue contributes to or causes anxiety, Christ's peace can guard the heart
- Can you stop being anxious? v. 13 you can do all things through Christ who strengthens

*That includes obeying v. 6, 'do not be anxious about anything'*

Dr. Emlet in Journal of Biblical Counseling: Scripture does not treat anxiety as high-handed sin but primarily as weakness and faintheartedness, and we should approach counselees accordingly (1 Thess 5:14).<sup>4</sup>

*'...encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient...'*

If we define anxiety as concern that consumes and deeply troubles us and affects us physically

- Jesus in the garden was tempted and troubled deeply and physically was sweating blood
- He was consumed/overwhelmed, said His flesh was weak, but no sin, He prayed like v. 6

Paul who wrote v. 6 also wrote this in 2 Cor 11:28 '*there is daily pressure on me of my anxiety*'

- Paul had consuming concern for churches that he turned to prayer like Jesus and like v. 6

*The anxious thought or temptation isn't sin, but it turns to sin if you don't obey v. 6*

'Be anxious' is in a present tense active form, don't continue in a state of anxiety, instead pray.

Biblical counselor David Powlison of CCEF: 'understand, harness, and channel your anxiety in constructive ways... [Phil 4:6] isn't telling us to get a grip or take a pill. The previous verse assures us that "the Lord is *near*" (4:5)...In your fretting and churning, you've forgotten it's not just you and your struggles going one-on-one. You have a hope that is bigger than any threat'<sup>5</sup>

### **OUTLINE: 1. Put off anxiety by prayer with praise (v. 6-7)**

#### **2. Put on right thinking biblically (v. 8)**

#### **3. Practice these things with His peace (v. 9)**

1<sup>st</sup> **Put off anxiety by prayer** in v. 6: *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer...*

- To put off anxiousness in anything we need to put on prayerfulness in everything.
- And before supplication or requests, v. 6 starts with a general word for prayer, worship
  - o The idea is approaching God's presence as His child coming to a loving Father
- We need to come first in praise and worship before coming with petitions and wants
  - o Before we request of the Lord in v. 6 we're called to rejoice in the Lord in v. 4

Prayer is much bigger than asking God, it's also adoring God in His character and attributes

- Jesus taught us to pray 'hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done'
- Then we're to pray with supplication (asking for needs like daily bread and forgiveness)
- But as we honor His holy name first, that takes our focus off our anxieties to who God is

After that so-called “Lord’s prayer” in Mt 6, v. 25 goes on ‘*do not be anxious about your life...which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?...Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?... if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you...your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom, and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow...*’

- Don’t anxiously seek your kingdom, seek His who knows your needs and meets them
- How much more will He for you who have much value in the sight of your Father God

The power of prayer isn’t in us or about us changing things so we get what we anxiously want

- it’s God powerfully changing us to His will being done (His will is us not being anxious)

In v. 6 prayer does include supplication (petition for need) or end of verse has ‘*requests to God*’

- v. 19 says God will provide all our needs, so you don’t need anxiety over what you need

Ed Welch in his *Guide Away from Fear and Anxiety* says v. 6 ‘means you should speak to the King about your worries. Here is a way to picture what you are doing when you pray: you are coming before the King...he invites you to come to him with your burdens, and he invites you to cast those burdens down. At first you assume that his servants will carry them away, but the King actually comes close to you and takes the burden onto himself...your worries on himself.’

- My sovereign King is also my loving Father who answers better than I ask!

So we pray supplications/petitions like Ps 139:23: ‘*Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.*’

Psalms 55 sounds like what would be called today an anxiety attack: ‘*My heart pounds in my chest. The terror ... Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can’t stop shaking. Oh, that I...would fly away...How quickly I would escape...But I will call on God, and the LORD will rescue me...and keep me safe...Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you*’ (NLT). That’s what Peter is paraphrasing from in his call to prayer in 1 Peter 5:7: ‘*casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you*’

So much of our anxiety is from bearing burdens God doesn’t call us to bear, that He alone can!

- Give it up, give it to God. You’re not God, and not in control and aren’t supposed to try
- You don’t and can’t know the future and you were never meant to bear burdens alone!
  - o So cast all your anxieties on Him who is God, who alone knows the future
  - o who is in control, who can carry that load you can’t and who cares for you!

How much does He care for you? Ps 103:6 ‘*as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love...As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion...he knows how we are formed*’

- Other versions say God ‘*knows our frame,*’ in other words He knows how we’re wired
- He’s compassionate to fears or phobias that frame little brains or form how we process
- He knows past traumas contribute to or complicate anxieties we cast on Him who cares

He comforts: Ps 94:19 ‘*In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul*’ (NKJV)

In another psalm David wrote ‘*I am full of anxiety*’ (38:18, same word as Phil 4:6 in Greek OT).

- But in that psalm and others David turned to prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
- I think that’s the key phrase in v. 6 for the anxious heart and mind: *...with thanksgiving*

In everything we're to pray with thanksgiving, and that includes everything we're anxious about

- Don't come with just your complaints, come with your thanks to a sovereign good Father
- Giving thanks is like wings for our prayers to make them rise to heaven with our requests
- Prayer without thanksgiving is like a bird without wings, it frantically flaps but can't fly

In an anxious trial, Ps 119 says I 'rise to give thanks' (119:62) and 'have great peace' (v. 165 NAS)

- God's peace that surpasses all comprehension (Phil 4:7) comes down as prayers go up.
- Anxiousness weighs us down but thankfulness lifts up hearts and minds in Christ Jesus
  - o God's blessing of transcendent peace comes down as our prayers of thanks go up

### Put off anxiety by prayer with praise, but don't miss the 2<sup>nd</sup> part: Put on right thinking biblically

In v. 8 Paul anticipates our thought life may still revert back to anxious thoughts in v. 6.

- What do we do then? How do you keep guard on your heart and mind in Christ Jesus?

<sup>8</sup> 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.

- If a worrisome thought comes that isn't **true**, you stop it like an intruder into a home
  - o An anxious imagination disturbs the peace that guards your heart, don't let him in!
- If anxious thoughts that aren't **honorable** to God come to the door, shut the door
  - o Those can't dwell in the dwelling of your mind. Ask what honors God
  - o and whatever doesn't, this guard or grid must keep those thoughts out.
- You can choose to dwell on or set your mind what's **right, pure, lovely, commendable**

Phil 4:8 ends with what's **admirable or praiseworthy** (like v. 6, what to thank the Lord for)

- Our anxiousness needs to be replaced with thankfulness in mind.
- It's not enough to put off worry, I have to put on worthy-of-praise thoughts.
- Luther said 'I can't stop birds flying overhead but I stop them nesting in my hair!'

Tim Witmer's has an excellent book *Mindscape: What to Think About Instead of Worrying:*

*true...honorable / noble* – God-honoring truth, like God is 'bigger than all our problems, worries, and fears...God is sovereign ...He reigns everywhere...all the time...over everything...[He] controls all for our good and his glory. There is peace in remembering the truth that we are not sovereign [in control] but live and work under Someone else's rule'

*right... pure...lovely...of good repute / commendable / admirable* – 'The power of admiration is that it fuels our aspirations of who we want to be and what we want to do.

Admiring others turns our minds from ourselves (always a good thing and often a source of our worries!) and gives us goals ...*you aspire to what you admire...* Whenever you're overcome with worries, with concern about all the things that could go wrong, ask for the Spirit to fill your mind with what is lovely instead. Then, by faith, turn your mind to the loveliness of Christ

*if there is any excellence / virtue and if anything worthy of praise* – we worry about our inadequacy and wonder how we can make a change in our lives or make it through the challenges we are facing...he has promised *everything* you need for life and godliness.

*Remember the excellence* that God is determined to produce in you [Peter says God '*called you to his own...excellence*']...*Remember...precious and very great/magnificent promises...*

- What we're anxious about often isn't true or honoring or any of that, but what to put on?
- Think of Jesus who is always true and honorable and just, and He's altogether lovely
- Think of the excellencies of Christ who alone is worthy of praise, set your mind on Him!

**Put on right thinking biblically, then 3rdly finally Practice these things with His peace**

<sup>9</sup> *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

Is the God of peace with you? Not all have this, scripture says there is no peace for the wicked

- Some of you don't have the peace of God because you don't have peace with God
- You need '*grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus*' (Phil 1:2).

Jesus is the Prince of Peace for all who come to Him for grace and confess Him as their Lord

- You turn from your sins and trust Him alone for what He did on the cross for your sins
- By faith in His death and resurrection, you get grace and peace surpassing understanding
- Believers in Christ practicing these things have this promise: the God of Peace with them

Isa 41:10 '*Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*'

Isa 35:4 '*Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God..."*' (NASB)

That God of peace is with us so we don't need to be anxious. The peace of God guards in v. 7

- Greek word *guard* was used of stationed troops that might form a garrison around a city
- a battalion of Roman soldiers, military sentinels, security forces to keep intruders out.

That's what God's peace does for hearts and minds, keeping out intruding anxious thoughts.

- As if God dispatched us heavenly peacekeeping special forces, security protection detail

It's been pointed out Paul wrote v. 7 'in a Roman prison and [he] could look right at the soldier charged to keep him safely in protective custody....Lloyd-Jones wrote...this peace of God will walk around the ramparts and towers of our life. We are inside, and the activities of the heart and mind are producing those stresses and anxieties and strains from the outside. But the peace of God will keep them all out and we ourselves inside will be at perfect peace...in Christ...'

End of v. 5 says the Lord is near. The Lord tempted to anxiety in the Garden of Gethsemane

- In great agony, distress and troubled soul, He collapsed and needed prayer and support
- He modeled for us how to go to the Father in prayer, which is what v. 6 calls us to do.

Isa 9:6 says Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor and the Prince of Peace for our peace and counsel

- He was tempted in every way like us and can sympathize with our weaknesses, Heb 4:15.
- With our anxieties and distressed troubled souls, He can 'bid our anxious fears subside.'
- When you're anxious, you're not alone, the Lord is with you as the end of v. 5 says.
  - o He's near, He's at hand to help us in v. 6 for the peace of v. 7.

*The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.*

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<sup>1</sup> [www.anxietycentre.com](http://www.anxietycentre.com)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016503272300530X>

<sup>3</sup> Autism in children or Alzheimer's / Dementia in adults can cause anxieties that fall under fallenness or weakness. There is still help and hope in these cases, but 1 Thessalonians 5:14 is instructive for different approaches to what the Bible tells us to put off. See also several medical conditions and medications that have anxiety as side effects in Woodrow W. Wendling, "Pharmacology for Pastoral Counselors," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 10, no. 3 (1991): 26–34, especially guidelines 2 and 5 but also note guideline 3.

<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Emler, "Scrupulosity: When Doubts Devour," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 33, no. 3 (2019): 26.

<sup>5</sup> David Powlison, "Overcoming Anxiety," in *The Life Counsel Bible*.

<sup>6</sup> v. 11, 13 NIV.