

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

OVERCOMING ANXIETY

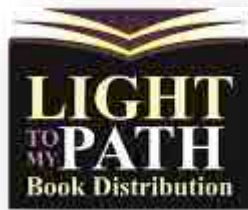
A devotional look at **Philippians 4:5-7**



Overcoming Anxiety

A Study of Philippians 4:5-7

F. Wayne MacLeod



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PREFACE

This is a study of Philippians 4:5-7 on the subject of anxiety. In its positive form, anxiety motivates us in service and draws us to the Lord for strength and peace. At the same time, however, if unchecked, it can also strip us of our joy and destroy us emotionally, spiritually and physically.

The apostle Paul knew what anxiety was about. He suffered greatly for the cause of Christ and bore a continual burden on his heart for the well-being of believers in the churches where he ministered. In Philippians 4:5-7, the apostle gives some basic principles for dealing with the anxiety that comes into our life.

I am not sharing anything new in this study. My goal is simply to reflect on what the apostle, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has to teach us about an experience that is common to us all. It would be easy to miss what Paul has to tell us here, but in these few short verses, the apostle provides for us God's solution to this problem of anxiety we all share.

My prayer is that the Lord would open up these verses in a fresh way for each reader. I trust that as you read, consider and pray, you will be encouraged and strengthened in your faith. The principles laid out in this study are not

mine—they come from the Lord God Himself as He revealed them to Paul. For this reason alone they are powerful. I trust that the Spirit of God, who inspired these words in Paul, will also apply them to your situation so that you will experience the peace that passes all understanding that Paul speaks about in this passage.

I wish you God's blessing as you embark on this brief study.

F. Wayne MacLeod

THE CONTEXT

1

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

5b The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:5-7)

Before we begin this study of Philippians 4:5-7, let's take a moment to consider the context. The words were written to the church in Philippi. These were difficult days for Christians. The apostle Paul was in prison for preaching the gospel. He did not know when or if he would ever get out. The church in Philippi had a deep concern for him. They had stood behind him in his missionary work and now in his suffering. Writing in Philippians 1:3-5 the apostle says:

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

The Philippian church was continually on the apostle's heart and in his prayers. This church had partnered with him in the gospel. Paul experienced this relationship with the Philippians not only in the good times but also in the difficult times. Even in his imprisonment this church continued to bless him.

In Philippians 1:12-18 Paul reminded the Philippians that in these difficult times, the Lord was powerfully at work. His imprisonment had caused many to take up the challenge of preaching the gospel. Paul's example had inspired others. He also told the Philippians that his imprisonment had resulted in some of the guards coming to know the truth of Jesus Christ. In his suffering Paul was experiencing the presence of the Lord and His power at work in him.

Admittedly, the pain and suffering Paul endured caused him to long for heaven. He wondered what would happen to him in prison and whether he would be killed for his faith in Jesus. Reflecting on this in Philippians 1:19-30, Paul reminded the believers, however, that he had nothing to fear. In fact, if he died, it would be "far better" for he would be in the presence of the Lord Jesus whom he loved (Philippians 1:23). If he stayed and faced the suffering of this life, he knew the Lord's presence and power would be with him to advance the Philippians in their faith. Whether in life or in death, God would not abandon him. In this he had great cause for hope and rejoicing.

Paul knew that the Philippian believers also faced difficulty and struggle. It was not easy to be a Christian in those days. Paul points them to the Lord Jesus in Philippians 2:1-11. He reminds the church of how the Lord Jesus, though He was God, willingly laid down His life for them. He suffered and died on the cross so that they could be forgiven. While men took His life, Jesus rose from the dead

and now has a name that is greater than any other name. Death could not defeat Him. Through His death and resurrection, many would know life. Through His suffering many would have victory.

From his own testimony in chapter 1 and the example of Jesus in Philippians 2:1-11, Paul moves on to the example of Timothy and Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:19-30. These men, too, were experiencing wonderful victory in the midst of suffering. In an age where many were only seeking their own interests, Timothy proved that he was a true servant by selflessly ministering to needs of others at his own expense. In this he demonstrated the spirit of Christ. Epaphroditus was sick and almost died, risking his life for the work of Christ (Philippians 2:27-30). Paul reminds the Philippians that God had mercy on Epaphroditus and spared his life so he could continue in service of the kingdom. The presence of God was evident in these two faithful servants who sacrificed and suffered much for the cause of their Lord.

Paul was aware that one of the struggles facing the church of Philippi came through false teachers circulating among them. These false teachers were trying to pervert the message of the Gospel. Paul challenged the church to resist these men and their lies. They were turning them away from Christ and the truth of the Gospel. Paul reminded the Philippians that he would willingly lose everything in this world if in the process he could know Christ and be found in Him (Philippians 3:8-10). Nothing in life compared to Christ. No pain or suffering could erase the joy of experiencing Christ. No other philosophy or doctrine could be compared to the truth He found in Jesus. Christ was his heart's greatest delight. To this end, he committed himself to strain toward the goal of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:14).

In the midst of all the struggles and trials of life, Paul experienced the presence and power of God at work in him. Epaphroditus demonstrated the reality of God in his sickness. Timothy joyfully exemplified the sacrificial heart and concern of God for the Philippians in what he suffered for them. There was something in the presence of God that was greater than all the sufferings and pains these men endured. Through His imprisonment, Paul knew the joy of the Lord. As he faced the thought of death, Paul felt only peace and joy knowing he would be in the presence of the One who loved him. Death could not defeat our Lord. He rose victorious over it. What He endured brought salvation and forgiveness for all who would receive it. Paul's imprisonment, as difficult as, served to advance the kingdom of God. In all these examples there is wonderful victory and hope in Christ.

We could go on, citing one example after another of how God's people, knowing His presence in tragic circumstances, overcame and conquered the attacks of the enemy. It is true that many of them suffered tremendously, but they were overcomers because God was with them. His strength was their joy and victory. His truth was their confidence. He was their comfort. In Him they overcame.

We often quote Philippians 4:6-7 without recognizing the context. Notice the words that precede Philippians 4:6: "The Lord is at hand." The English Standard Version of the Bible puts a semi colon after this phrase indicating that it belongs with verse 6. What we need to understand is that Paul's exhortation about not being anxious is rooted solidly in the context of the whole book of Philippians and particularly in the phrase that precedes it: "The Lord is at hand."

The Lord Jesus is the focus of these verses. It is because He is near that we can experience the reality of what Paul

tells us in verses 6-7. What hope would we have were it not for Jesus? What confidence would we have to face death if it were not for what He has done? What assurance would we have of forgiveness if it were not for Christ's work? Were it not for the fact that the Lord Jesus was at hand, we would have every reason in the world to be overcome with anxiety. Our hope rests completely in Him. Paul's illustrations and teaching in this book all point to the Lord Jesus as our hope and confidence. It is His presence and ministry that give us assurance and confidence.

As we take the time over the next few chapters to examine Paul's challenge to the Philippian church, we need to understand that what he is saying is written to those who have confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. Paul was writing to believers here. If you have never come to know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, I would challenge you, as you read this book, to turn to Him and trust in what He has done, for it is in Him alone that we can truly be freed from the anxiety of which Paul speaks in these verses.

May this study be one that brings strength, encouragement and comfort in the midst of the struggles and cares of life that bring on anxiety.

For Consideration:

- Where was the apostle Paul at the time of writing this letter? What particular struggles was he facing? How did he experience the power of God in those sufferings?
- How did the sufferings of the Lord Jesus accomplish God's purpose for our lives?

- How did the suffering of Epaphroditus demonstrate the care and concern of God?
- How does the knowledge of God's presence comfort and reassure the believer? What hope would we have if we did not have this assurance?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the assurance you have of His presence in your life and suffering.
- Ask the Lord to help you to set your eyes on Him in your suffering in life. Thank Him for the hope He brings.

2

REJOICING, REASONABLENESS AND THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

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... (Philippians 4:4-6)

Context is of utmost importance if we are to understand any Bible passage. In the previous chapter we examined the context of the book of Philippians. Now it falls on us to examine the specific context of these verses.

We saw in the previous chapter that Paul has been speaking with the Philippians about some of the struggles they were experiencing. Despite these struggles, they knew the presence of Christ and His power in their lives. Even tragedy, when placed in the hands of Christ, turns out for good. Death is rendered powerless by means of the work of Christ. Trials are used to shape us and draw us closer to

Him. In light of this context the apostle Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4).

Notice that their rejoicing is not in the circumstances of life. We all face trials in this world. Paul is not telling us that he enjoyed being stoned and beaten. He is not telling us that he was happy about how people rejected his message. He is telling us, however, that despite these circumstances, he had a sovereign Lord who was above all that life threw at him. This Lord knows all about what we face and will draw near to us in those moments to comfort and strengthen us. This is what He had done for Paul in prison. It is what he did for Epaphroditus in His sickness. In this we have great reason to rejoice. Our rejoicing is not in our trial, but in the Lord who is greater than our trial and in His presence that will never leave us.

Notice also that Paul told the Philippian believers to rejoice in the Lord “always.” When life deals a heavy blow we have one of two options. We can either focus on the blow or we can focus on Jesus. If we focus on what happens to us, we will find ourselves disappointed and discouraged. If, on the other hand, we make a conscious decision to look beyond our suffering and trial to the Lord, we will have great reason to rejoice no matter what happens. He is Lord over all circumstances of life. He will strengthen, encourage or use whatever happens for our good and His glory. In this knowledge, we have reason to rejoice always.

Paul continued his exhortation to the Philippians in verse 5. Here he told them to let their “reasonableness be known to everyone.” The word “reasonableness” can be translated by the words, “mild”, “gentle”, or “patient”. The context, again, is one of suffering and difficulties in life. When life deals a heavy blow, we need to respond in a mild, gentle and reasonable way.

How easy it is to be unreasonable when things don't work out as we expected. We can become angry and say things we do not mean. We can become controlling and seek to manipulate things to suit our needs. We can react in ways that we will regret later. Paul is telling us that instead of reacting in this way, we need to be "reasonable," recognizing the fact that the Lord God knows what we face. He is bigger than our trouble and He will work things out in His time and in His way.

According to Paul, believers are to let this patience, mildness and reasonableness be known to everyone. In fact, the reasonableness of the believer in times of struggle is a powerful witness to the world about his or her belief in a loving and caring Saviour.

How is it possible for the believer to rejoice in the sufferings that come their way? What makes the believer able to be reasonable in suffering and trial? Paul tells us in verse 5 that it is because "the Lord is at hand." These words can be understood in two ways.

First, the Lord is at hand could be understood in the sense that He is returning soon. In other words, He is coming back to gather His children and take them to be with Him forever. Sin and evil will be abolished and believers will rule with Him forever in a kingdom where there will be no more sorrow or suffering. This hope and confidence is cause for great rejoicing when life becomes difficult. It enables us to be reasonable in how we deal with suffering and injustice.

Second, the phrase "the Lord is at hand" could also be understood in the sense that no matter what we face, the

Lord is near and will keep and protect us. This is what the Psalmist understood when he wrote in Psalm 23:4:

Even though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

Our hearts can be at peace and rejoicing because we know that the Lord Jesus will return and make everything right. We can respond in a reasonable and gentle way to the struggles of life because we know that the Lord Jesus is with us and will guide and keep us no matter what happens. His presence will be our comfort, security and delight no matter what life throws at us.

This is the context for Philippians 4:6-7. Paul speaks here about how to deal with the anxiety that comes our way. It is only in this context of the Lord's guiding and strengthening presence that verses 6-7 are possible. The focus is on the Lord Jesus. He is at hand. He is the conquering Savior who works out all things for His glory and our good. He has conquered death and hell. He is returning to establish His physical kingdom. He will never leave us. He will remain by our side strengthening and equipping us to do all He requires.

How thankful we ought to be today for a Saviour who loves us enough to be concerned about every pain or trial we face. How our hearts should rejoice knowing that He will walk with us through the deepest of valleys and the highest of mountains. Nothing can separate us from His care. He will provide all we need to walk in victory. In this we can

rejoice. This knowledge enables us to respond in a reasonable way when life deals its harshest blow.

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between rejoicing in our suffering and rejoicing in the Lord?
- How does setting our eyes on the Lord change our outlook in the midst of pain and suffering?
- Paul challenges the believers to be reasonable in their response to suffering and trials in their life (mild, gentle and patient). What knowledge do we have as believers that make this kind of response possible?
- What comfort do you find in knowing that the Lord is near? Have you always recognized this in your suffering?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He takes care of those who belong to Him.
- Ask the Lord to help you to keep your eyes on Him and His purpose when things are difficult. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you failed to keep Him as your focus.
- Ask God to help you to be more patient and gentle in the things you are going through today.
- Thank the Lord that He never abandons those who belong to Him. Thank Him for His presence in your trial today. Thank Him that He will work out all things for your good and His glory.

3

ANXIOUS

We come now to the central subject of this study. In light of the context we have examined in the first two chapters, the apostle Paul told the Philippian believers that they were not to be anxious about anything (Philippians 4:6). Let's take a moment in this chapter to examine the word "anxious."

The word Paul uses is the Greek word "*merimnao*". In its very general sense the word could be translated by "careful". In other words, we are not to give undue care or concern to a matter. It has the idea of thinking about or being troubled about something. This word is used a number of times in the New Testament.

Jesus uses the word "*merimnao*" four times in Matthew 6:25-33 when He says:

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?
26 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? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But 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, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Notice what Jesus tells us about anxiety in these verses. He tells us in verse 27 that all our restless concern will not add a single hour to our life. God alone is in control of these matters. Anxiety relates to giving undue care and concern to something we have no control over. Instead of simply trusting God with these matters, we become anxious.

Anxiety, according to Jesus, is unreasonable. He reminds us that the birds of the air do not prepare food for themselves but they are well provided for. The flowers of the field did not spin clothes but God made them more beautiful than anything made by human hands. Is it reasonable to assume that a loving God would provide for the flowers of the field and not for His own children? Anxiety, at its very root is fed by mistrust.

Anxiety often has to do with improper thinking and lack of trust in God. It is a way of thinking that does not take God

into consideration. In Matthew 6:32, Jesus told His listeners that the Gentile unbelievers had concerns because they did not know the Father. Those who knew God, however, could trust in His provision and protection. Anxiety would be understandable for the unbeliever who did not have a loving Saviour to care for them, but it would not be reasonable for those who know a loving God.

In Matthew 10:19-20 Jesus told His disciples that the day was coming when they would be handed over to officials and tried for their faith. In those days they would be asked to give an account of their beliefs and actions. Listen to the promise of the Lord to His disciples when this happened:

19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.
20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Notice that Jesus told His disciples not to be anxious about what they were to say. The Holy Spirit would be present with the disciples in their moment of trial. He would lead them in what they were to say. For this reason they were not to give undue thought to their defense. They were to trust God and say what He would give them to say. They could free their minds of excessive worry and concern, because God promised to give them all they needed when the time was right.

The apostle Peter told his readers to cast all their anxieties on God because He cared for them (see 1 Peter 5:7). Peter realized that there would be trouble in this life but that believers had someone who cared for them on whom they could cast their anxieties. They were not to give undue thought and concern to their problems. Instead they were

to entrust themselves to the Lord's care. He would provide what they needed and work out the details. Their minds could be at peace as they rested in His loving purpose.

We see from these verses that undue care and concern about the things of this life shows us that we are not putting our confidence in our heavenly Father. There is an anxiety that comes from a lack of trust in God and His Word.

Jesus taught that anxiety could keep us from experiencing what God had in store. In Luke 8 Jesus told the story of a farmer who sowed his seed. Some of the seed fell among thorns and was choked out as it grew up. Jesus explained this in Luke 8:14 when He said:

And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

The word translated "cares" in verse 14 is the same word Paul uses in Philippians 4:6 when he speaks about being anxious. Jesus tells us that these "anxieties" (or cares) can keep us from maturing in our faith. Anxiety can keep us from trusting the Lord and walking in the fullness of His power. It can keep us from stepping out in faith or trusting God's promises. Our anxieties are like thorns that choke our trust in God so that our "fruit does not mature" (Luke 8:14).

In Luke 10:41 we meet Martha, who gave herself wholeheartedly to making Jesus and His disciples comfortable. In the process, however, she became very anxious in her heart about all she needed to do. Seeing what was happening in Martha and how this anxiety was beginning to control her, Jesus said:

“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken from her.

While Martha was busy in service, Mary had chosen to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to Him. Jesus does not tell Martha to stop serving, but He does reprimand her for the anxiety that had become the cause of her jealous and negative attitude toward her sister. This shows us that anxiety can be the root of many sins and must be addressed before it causes us to do or say things we regret.

Martha felt overwhelmed with responsibility. Who among us has not been in a situation where we feel overwhelmed? In those times we dig in and try to figure out how we can get on top of our situation. We draw all we can from our human resources and thoughts, leading us to deeper concern and worry as we begin to feel like we are failing in our efforts to get things under control. Our anxious thoughts begin to control us. Martha did what was right in this situation. She came to the Lord and spoke to Him about it. Admittedly, she came telling Him what to do, but at least she came to the Lord. He gave her the solution. He told her that she needed to rest in Him and listen to His leading. She needed to seek His wisdom and guidance like her sister Mary was doing. All her anxious concerns were keeping her from hearing God and allowing Him to lead her.

So far we have examined what Scripture teaches about the negative impact of anxiety. The words “*merimna*” or “*merimnao*” are also used to describe legitimate concerns and cares in life. Take for example Paul’s words to the Corinthians about whether they should marry. Writing in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34 Paul says:

32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. 33 But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.

Paul's use of the word "*merimna*" (anxious) is quite interesting here. While he told the Corinthians that he wanted them to be free from anxieties he also said that the unmarried man was anxious about the things of the Lord, and how to be holy in body and spirit. The married person was anxious about pleasing his or her spouse. How are we to understand what Paul is saying here? Is Paul telling us that we should not give careful thought to how to please the Lord, our husbands or our wives? Is he telling us that these things should never trouble us? The answer seems to lie in our understanding of Paul's use of the words "*merimna*" or "*merimnao*" (anxious).

Consider how the apostle uses "*merimnao*" in 1 Corinthians 12:21-25:

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there

may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

After speaking about the way God has given gifts to each believer and how every believer is important, Paul ends the passage with the statement: “that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.” The word translated “care” is the Greek word “*merimnao*.” In this context there can be no doubt that Paul understood this kind of concern to be legitimate and necessary. He is saying that it is the purpose of God that we have this deep care or anxiety about the well-being of our brothers and sisters in Christ. In a similar way, the “anxiety” of pleasing the Lord, living a holy life or pleasing one’s husband or wife is also a legitimate one.

In Philippians 2:20 Paul speaks to the church at Philippi about Timothy and his great concern for them:

For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

In this context, Paul is commending Timothy for his concern or “anxiety” for the welfare of the Philippians. Again Paul uses this word “*merimnao*” to refer to a legitimate and godly concern for a brother or sister.

There is yet another use of this word in 2 Corinthians 11. In this passage Paul speaks to the church about his suffering as an apostle. He concludes his remarks by saying:

And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:28)

Notice the phrase: “the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.” Paul experienced daily pressure and anxiety for the churches for which he was responsible. This “anxiety” translated into a deep concern for these churches and their well-being. It drove Paul to passionately do all he could to see that these churches were walking in a manner worthy of the Lord.

The use of the word “*merimnao*” in Scripture teaches us three things concerning anxiety. First, there is a type of anxiety that comes from a lack of trust in God and His Word. The person who is anxious in this way is unable to see God in the circumstances of his or her life and unable to trust His promises.

Second, anxiety can keep us from becoming all God intends. It is possible for us to become so concerned about our ministry or our possessions and lifestyle that we cannot surrender these things to the Lord God. It is also possible for us to be so anxious that we dare not risk stepping into His promises. There is a recklessness to faith that anxiety cannot tolerate. Anxiety demands that everything be planned and organized. God’s ways do not always appear rational. Those who struggle with this type of anxiety hold back and are trapped by their cares and concerns so that they are unable to move forward in the purpose of God.

Finally, the word “*merimnao*” is used to describe a legitimate concern that will draw us to the Lord and His promises. This is reflected in Paul’s teaching about the anxiety we need to have for our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is the passionate and overwhelming desire to please the Lord and walk in holiness of life or the passion to please a husband or wife in a godly way. Anxiety is not always a

negative thing. It can be a healthy expression of our faith, motivating us to greater service and confidence in God.

For Consideration:

- How can anxiety keep us from trusting the Lord and His promises? Have you ever felt this type of anxiety in your life?
- How can anxiety keep us from stepping into the purpose of God for our lives?
- How can anxiety lead us into sin?
- Is there a type of anxiety that is healthy for the believer?
- How can we know the difference between a healthy anxiety and an unhealthy anxiety?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to set you free from any form of anxiety that keeps you from trusting His Word and the promises He has given.
- Ask the Lord to give you a deeper concern for other believers, for holiness of life and for becoming all that He intends you to become.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have let your anxiety control and cause you to fall into sin.

THE CHALLENGE

4

DO NOT BE

ANXIOUS ABOUT ANYTHING

The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything (Philippians 4:5-6)

In the first three chapters we have examined the context of Philippians 4:6-7. It now falls upon us to examine the passage itself in light of this context. Paul begins by challenging the Philippians: “Do not be anxious about anything.”

Anxiety and Responsibility

As we seek to understand what the apostle is saying, it is important that we do so in the context of the rest of Scripture. As believers we are called to take our responsibilities seriously. Consider what Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:8:

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

He said something similar in 2 Corinthians 12:14:

Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.

Paul understood the importance of taking responsibility for those God has put under our care. In the passages quoted above he reminds believers of their obligation toward the members of their own family.

What is true of our physical family is also true of our spiritual family. The Lord God spoke very harshly to the spiritual leaders of Ezekiel's day. They had been called as shepherds of the flock but they were not taking that responsibility seriously. Listen to what the Lord says to these spiritual shepherds in Ezekiel 34:

2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? 3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. 6 My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were

scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. 7 "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 8 As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, 9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 10 Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

This passage is very important as we consider what the apostle Paul is telling us in Philippians 4:6. God had called these shepherds to care for the flock. This demanded giving thought and concern to the needs of those who were under their care. They were to feed the sheep that were hungry. They were to heal those who were sick. All this required a tremendous amount of energy and concern. God expected nothing less of these shepherds.

Any parent will tell you that they live each day with the concerns of their children on their heart. A good pastor will bear the burdens of his flock on his heart and prayers. This was what Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 11:28. After speaking about all his suffering for the gospel, he said:

And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Paul challenged the church in Galatia to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2). He told the Philippians not to only look to their own interests “but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4).

There are many God given responsibilities and obligations in life. If we are serious about those obligations, we will find they are often on our mind. We must give careful thought and prayer to how to care for those God has put under our care. This obligation will cost us something. The mother caring for her sick child will become weary and tired. The pastor, concerned for the well-being of his church will be deeply burdened. There will be times when we groan under the weight of responsibility. Consider Jesus, whose sweat “became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:24) as He contemplated what was ahead for Him on the cross. There was a deep emotional and physical cost for Jesus to take on our sins and die. He felt this in the very depth of His being.

When Paul told the Philippian believers that they were not to be anxious about anything, he was not telling them that should be careless about their responsibilities. He knew they would feel pain and experience emotional stress. There would be times when, like Jesus, they would groan in their spirit under the pressure. Paul had often experienced this in his personal life and ministry. There is a physical and emotional cost to pay for carrying out our God-given responsibilities in this life.

What did Paul mean when he said that they were not to be anxious about anything? It seems to me what Paul was telling them was that they were not to give more care or thought to those things that caused them grief than was merited in light of God’s provision, protection and guidance. Let’s take a moment to consider this in more detail.

The anxiety Paul seems to be speaking about here is an anxiety that loses sight of the reality of God's provision, protection and guidance. The problems and obligations of life become so big they seem to block the Lord out completely. We begin to live in the sense that everything depends on our effort. We begin to feel like our destiny is now shaped by this great cloud that surrounds us. The sunshine of God's face has been hidden from us. We experience a sense of despair, feeling that we are trapped by our pain, grief or struggle. We fail to see the hand of God or understand His greater purpose. The focus is on the object of our anxiety and not on the Lord.

This kind of anxiety blocks our trust in the Lord and blinds us to His presence. We will experience deep concerns and burdens in this life, but those concerns and burdens must always be tempered with an understanding that we have a God who is over all. He loves us deeply and will care for us no matter what life may bring. When we understand this reality we are free to not give undue concern to the problems before us. The key word here is the word "undue." In other words, there will always be concerns and cares in life. The believer, however, experiences these things in light of God's sovereignty and care. He understands that while life is often harsh and our responsibilities are heavy, there is a God in heaven whose power and wisdom are at our disposal. He reaches down to us and knows every pain and trial we face. He will provide all that is needed and will care for us in every circumstance of life.

Is there an emotional, physical and spiritual cost to pay to be faithful to the call of God on our lives? There certainly is. Will believers have to face trials and struggles in life? They certainly will. Do these problems need to keep us from experiencing the provision, leading and strength of God? Not at all! The believer has no cause for despair,

even in the midst of the deepest stresses of life. Our God is greater than anything life can throw at us. In the midst of deep pain and suffering we can live with the understanding that our God is still in control. In the word of the Psalmist we can say:

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I will again praise him,
my salvation and my God. (Psalm 42:5-6)

Notice what the Psalmist says in this psalm. He recognized that his soul was cast down and in turmoil (it was an anxious soul). He was not free from emotional struggle. But he didn't remain in that place of turmoil. He turned his eyes to the Lord God, recognizing Him as the God of his salvation and hope. This is the call of God for each of us today.

Are you feeling anxious? Is your soul in turmoil? Take a moment to lift up your head and look to the God of your salvation. Recognize that He is Lord of all. Submit to His care and provision. Trust in Him. We can only learn to be "anxious for nothing" when we look to the one who is bigger than any problem life will throw at us.

For Consideration:

- Are there legitimate concerns and cares in life for the believer? What are they?
- Will our responsibilities and obligations in life bring us stress or pain? Is there an emotional, physical and spiritual cost to pay for taking our God-given responsibilities seriously?

- What does it mean to give “undue” concern or thought to something? When do we know that our concern is more than it should be?
- How can anxiety keep us from trusting the Lord and His provision, protection and guidance?
- How does knowing the provision, protection and guidance of the Lord keep us from undue anxiety and concern?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be serious about the responsibilities and obligations He has given you today.
- Commit yourself to be faithful to the Lord in what He has called you to do no matter the cost.
- Ask the Lord to help you never to lose sight of His protection, provision and guidance even when things in life are difficult.
- Thank the Lord that He never leaves or forsakes you.

THE SOLUTION

5

BY PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION

... but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

In the first part of Philippians 4:6 we considered the challenge of Paul: “Do not be anxious about anything.” We also considered how this is possible. As we continue in this verse Paul shares some practical insights with the Philippians on how to make this challenge a reality in their lives. In this meditation we will consider Paul’s advice to the Philippians about prayer and supplication.

It is one thing to know that the Lord God is a sovereign and loving God and another to be able to rest in this reality when trouble seems to overwhelm us. How can we get what we know in our mind to quiet our heart and keep us from undue care and anxiety? Paul tells us that one of the ways to do this is by prayer and supplication.

Prayer

Notice how Paul speaks about both prayer and supplication in verse 6. While there are many similarities in these two words they also reflect two different actions on our part. The Greek word used by the apostle Paul for prayer is the word “*proseuche*.” While this word is used in the New Testament to speak of prayer in a general sense it also carries with it a sense of worship. In fact, in Acts 16 the word is used to speak of a place of worship (a place of prayer).

13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. (Acts 16:13)

16 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. (Acts 16:16)

Notice here the use of the phrase “house of prayer.” The word used here is the same word Paul uses in Philippians 4:6 when he challenges us not to be anxious but to pray. While the Jews generally worshipped in a synagogue or in the temple, not every community had enough of a Jewish presence to make this possible. This meant that those who wanted to worship the Lord would have to find a place where they could gather in quiet to worship the Lord in a more informal way. This is what happened in these places of prayer.

Paul challenged the Philippian believers, in light of the struggles and trials all around them to make this kind of

worshipping prayer an important part of their lives. Consider for a moment what the Jews who went to this place of prayer did. They would stop their work and daily activity and go to this quiet place. There, with other believers, they would remember their God, consider His attributes, lift up His name and praise Him for what He had done. They would trust Him for even more. This place of prayer was a shelter from the cares of the week. It was a time to place themselves afresh under the watchful eye and the gracious hand of their loving heavenly Father.

How does this apply to what Paul is telling us in Philippians 4:6? If we are to overcome and live without undue care and anxiety in the trials that come our way, we will need to find the time to go to the place of prayer and worship. We will need to stop for a moment and sit at the feet of the Lord God. We will need to take our eyes off our pain and lift them up to our sovereign and all-powerful God. We need to see Him afresh and be reminded of His presence and power. There in that place of prayer we need to be renewed in our confidence in Him and His provision so that our hearts can overflow again with praise and thanksgiving in God.

Is your heart anxious about the cares you bear? Do you feel overwhelmed with the burdens you carry today? Take the time to go to the place of prayer. Let your mind and heart be refreshed there in the presence of the Lord and in the knowledge of who He is. Remember Him, praise Him and trust Him in this place. Martin Luther once said:

If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the Devil gets the victory through the day... I have

so much business, I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.¹

I am not saying that we all need to spend three hours every day praying. What I am saying, however, is that the place of prayer is a place where we can meet with God, remember who He is and leave with a greater confidence in His care and provision. If you want to deal with the undue anxieties in your life you will need to find the time to meet with God and be refreshed in His presence and in the knowledge of who He is. Worship and praise gives our anxieties perspective.

Supplication

The second word Paul uses here is the word “supplication.” The Greek word is “*deesis*.” The word “*deesis*” speaks of a petition or a request. It comes from a word literally meaning to beg. It carries with it the sense of seeking God’s blessing or provision in our time of need. It implies that we have a need and we are coming to Him to fulfil that need.

This brings another dimension to what Paul is saying about how to deal with anxieties. Not only are God’s people to take the time to remember God and who He is, but they are also to bring their needs to Him and petition Him for all they need to overcome and walk in victory. Paul reminded

¹ Quoted from Eternal Perspectives Ministries
(<http://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Jan/28/great-quotes-prayer/>)

the believers in Philippians 4:19 that God would supply all they needed:

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Paul's counsel to the believers in Philippi was to go to the Lord and make their requests. When life is difficult and you wonder how you will get through, go to God and ask Him for strength. When important decisions need to be made, go to God and ask Him for wisdom. Paul was confident that the Lord God would provide all the strength and wisdom needed to face any obstacle in life.

It is relatively easy for us to ask God for those things we need. Asking is not necessarily a solution to the undue anxiety we feel. I have asked God for things and then acted as if everything still depended on me. The supplication that Paul speaks about here is not the kind of prayer that comes from someone who has everything planned out and simply wants God's blessing. As we have already mentioned, the word Paul uses here comes from a word "to beg." Those who come to God in this way, come as beggars. They come recognizing that they really do need His provision and wisdom because they do not have it in themselves. They come asking and they leave trusting in what He provides. They choose to accept what He gives in response to those prayers, whether they understand it or not. They recognize Him as Lord and commit themselves to walking in obedience.

Paul makes two suggestions for dealing with anxiety. First, find that place of prayer and remember who God is. Let your heart overflow with praise and worship to Him for His sovereign and loving care. Second, come to God as one truly in need and ask Him to provide. Paul was convinced

that God would supply everything required. We might not understand what God is doing, but we can be assured that whatever God provides will be suitable to the task and with it will come victory.

For Consideration:

- Paul uses two different words in this passage to speak about prayer. What is the difference between them? Do your prayers reflect this?
- Do you have a regular time in a place of prayer? How does taking time to remember God help with undue anxiety you may face?
- Is it possible to pray and still do things in our own way and in our own strength? What is the difference between coming to God recognizing our need and coming to God to bless our own efforts and wisdom?
- How does knowing God will supply all our needs help in dealing with anxiety? Do you trust Him to supply your particular need today?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you not only to ask for things in your prayers but also to take the time to worship and recognize Him as Lord and Provider.
- Ask the Lord to give you a regular time to reflect on who He is and to let the encouragement of this overflow in worship in your life.
- Thank the Lord that He does care for you. Thank Him that He is bigger than any problem we will encounter in life.

- Ask the Lord to help you in your times of anxiety to be able to remember who He is and rely on what He provides.

6

THANKFULNESS

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything
by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving...
(Philippians 4:6)

In the previous chapter we considered Paul's advice to the Philippians about prayer and supplication and how this can help us with the undue anxieties we feel in life. Paul continues in verse 6 to recommend another solution to anxiety—thankfulness.

Initially it is difficult to understand how someone could be thankful when the cares and worries of life surround them. Remember, however, that in this passage the apostle is speaking to believers. They understood that the Lord their God was a sovereign God who was over all that happened in life. Admittedly, many terrible things happen in life because of bad decisions, greed or lust. While God is not to blame for these things, He is able to use the evil that happens to us for our good.

Consider the example of Joseph in the book of Genesis. Out of jealousy, his brothers threw him into a pit and sold him into slavery. While they intended to harm Joseph, God

turned all this around. There, in Egypt, Joseph became a very important man—second in command under Pharaoh. When a great famine hit the nations of that day, Joseph was used of God to save the lives of his brothers. Speaking about how they had sold him into slavery, Joseph would say to his brothers:

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Genesis 50:20)

The same principle applies to the life and death of the Lord Jesus. Evil men put Him to death on the cross. God, however, chose to use that death to accomplish the salvation of the world. What was meant for evil was used for good. There are many other examples in the Bible of how God changed evil into good.

Hebrews 5:8, speaking about the Lord Jesus says this:

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

This shows us something else about the things that happen to us. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus, even though He was the Son of God, learned obedience through the things He suffered. God uses the things we face to train and mature us in the faith. Sometimes the lessons we learn are very difficult. Life deals some heavy blows but God uses them to strengthen us and chip away the things that keep us from Him.

Some years ago I was in a car accident. For some unknown reason, I passed out while I was driving my car and ended up upside down in a ditch just a short distance from

a big pond. Until doctors could discover the reason why I lost consciousness while driving, I was not able to drive my car. This meant not being able to get to Bible studies and preaching engagements. As a result of this I lost a good part of my ministry. This was a difficult time for me as I wasn't sure what was wrong with me medically. I was also concerned about losing so many ministry opportunities. I remember crying out to the Lord at that time: "Lord, I am ready to go through this but don't allow me to come out the other side the same. Teach me all you need me to learn so that this trial is not wasted." This was my heart in those days. I wanted God to use what I was going through to draw me closer to Himself and make me a better instrument for His glory.

This is not the only such illustration I could give. There have been many other similar and more difficult times in my life. God brings us through deep valleys at times to teach us our greatest lessons. As we surrender to Him, we will never be the same. God will strengthen us through the trials we face.

Not only will God use the trials we face for good and strengthen us through them but He also promises to go through the trials with us. Daniel's friends in Daniel 3 faced a great trial when they were thrown into the fiery furnace because they refused to bow down to the king's idol. There in the midst of that furnace they experienced the wonderful presence of the Lord God (see Daniel 3:24-25).

This passage came very much alive to me when I was serving on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. I had been asked to work with a church that had experienced some serious division. The work was emotionally draining as we had to deal with many problems. Each person had their own perspective on what had happened to

cause the division in the church. To be honest, there were times when I literally broke down in tears as a result of the stress I was feeling.

It was at this time I received news from a fellow missionary who was working in another country. As I listened to his report of the great things God was doing, I found myself crying out to God: "Lord, why can't I experience this kind of blessing. My friend is seeing You work in wonderful ways. He's like the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, right there in Your presence seeing Your glory."

Feeling somewhat sorry for myself and the call God had placed on my life at that time I said: "Lord, while he's up there on the mountain like the three disciples in Your presence, I feel like I'm stuck in the furnace of trials and affliction."

As soon as I said this, the Lord reminded me of Daniel's three friends in the furnace. I then felt Him speak to my heart and say: "Wayne, do you think that Daniel's three friends sensed My presence any less than those three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration?"

As I reflected on this for a moment I came to realize that the presence of the Lord was no less in the furnace than on the mountain. God does not leave us when we pass through the fires. We can know the fullness of His glorious presence in even the worst trials. In fact, sometimes His presence is even more real in those trials than in our times of ease.

There is one other thing I want to say about the trials and suffering we experience in life. God will bring final and complete victory over all our enemies. The book of Revelation makes this quite clear. The apostle John tells us that

the beast and the false prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20) as will the devil (Revelation 20:10) and death (Revelation 20:14). In the presence of the Lord God there will be no more cause for pain, sickness or death. All tears will be wiped away (Revelation 21:4) and we will live in the presence of the Lord forever (Revelation 21:3). There is great hope and reason for thanksgiving in this truth.

This was the hope of the Philippians. They knew that God could change and use whatever evil was done to them. He could take what was intended for evil and use it for their good. He would strengthen them through the things they suffered. He would never leave them and they could be assured of His presence in the fiercest of trials. Ultimately God would conquer all of their enemies and bring them to Himself where they would live throughout all eternity in His glorious presence.

Andrew Murray summarizes what we are saying here beautifully when he says:

IN TIME OF TROUBLE SAY:

First—

God brought me here; it is by His will I am in this strait place: in that I will rest.

Next—

He will keep me in His love, and give me grace in this trial to behave as His child.

Then—

He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow.

Last—

In His good He can bring me out again—how and when He knows.

Say: I am here—

1. By God's appointment
2. In His keeping
3. Under His training
4. For His time. ²

What does all this have to do with thankfulness? The answer is quite clear. Those who know that God will use whatever trial comes their way for good have reason to thank the Lord. Those who understand that God is using the circumstances of life to strengthen them and draw them closer have great cause for gratitude. What gratefulness ought to fill our hearts when we understand that the Lord God will not leave us but will walk through every fiery trial with us. How thankful we need to, know that the day is coming when the devil, death and suffering will all be banished and we will be forever with our Lord.

The thankfulness Paul speaks about here is a reflection of our confidence and hope in a sovereign God who knows all about our struggle and will use it to accomplish great good in our lives. We can only be thankful when we understand and know this God. Thankfulness is a reflection of our faith in God and His work in our lives. It is a faith-based

² Choy, Leona, Andrew Murray, *Apostle of Abiding Love*, Pennsylvania: Christian Literature Crusade, 1978, pg. 215.

confidence in His purpose and plan in whatever comes our way.

As we come to God with thankfulness we reflect our confidence in Him and His purpose. We recognize that He is Lord over all circumstances of life. Our confidence wells up in thankfulness despite the opposition we face because we know Him to be Lord over all. Thankfulness for who God is and what He does helps us to deal with the undue anxiety that comes our way.

For Consideration:

- List four reasons why we can be thankful in the midst of our problems and struggles in life.
- How does a lack of thankfulness demonstrate a lack of faith?
- How does thankfulness change our attitude toward our suffering and trials?
- Can we experience true thankfulness apart from Christ and our understanding of God and His purposes?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to understand more fully how He uses suffering and stress in our lives to accomplish His greater purpose.
- Take a moment to consider something that causes you anxiety in life. Thank the Lord that He is greater than this source of anxiety. Thank Him that He will use it in your life for good. Thank Him also that He will walk with you through this.

- Thank the Lord that He has a purpose for you and the things He has allowed to happen in your life. Thank Him that even when these things are the result of evil intentions on the part of fellow human beings, He is able to use what they do or say to strengthen you and draw you closer to Himself.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have grumbled and complained about the things that have happened to you. Ask Him to give you a greater thankfulness in your heart for who He is and for what He can do through these trials.

7

LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN

... but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Paul goes on in verse 6 to say that in light of the problems and trials that could cause undue anxiety, believers were to make their requests known to God. Let's take a moment to examine this phrase and its application to this matter of anxiety.

What does it mean to make something known? Usually, it refers to telling someone something they do not already know. This, however, cannot be the case for God, because He already knows all things. Consider what Daniel says about God:

20 Daniel answered and said:

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.

21 He changes times and seasons;

he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;
22 he reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him. (Daniel 2:20-22)

Notice particularly verse 22. Daniel tells us that God “reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness.” We understand from this and many other passages of Scripture that nothing is hidden from the Lord God. Matthew 10:30 tells us that He knows the number of hairs on our head. In Jeremiah 23:24 the Lord reminds His people:

Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.

The psalmist told his readers in Psalm 94:11 that the Lord “knows the thoughts of man.” Jesus Himself declared:

For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. (Luke 8:17)

What we need to see from this is that the Lord God knows all things. There is nothing we can tell Him that He does not already know.

What did Paul mean when He tells us to make our requests known to God? Ultimately, he is telling us to bring our requests to God and commit them to Him. There is an important truth we need to understand in this passage. While God knows all about our needs, He still expects us to come to Him with those needs. He asks us to share those needs

with Him. His ears are always open to hear us. He longs to bless us, but He often requires that we ask.

There are blessings we will never know simply because we have never asked the Lord for them. The apostle James tells us that we do not have because we do not ask (see James 4:2). We have freedom to bring our requests to the Lord or freedom to do things in our own wisdom and strength. This is often the temptation for us. We often do all we can in our own strength and wisdom and only when this is insufficient do we come to the Lord.

The words to the popular hymn, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, are very appropriate in this context:

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer.³

Notice what Joseph M. Scriven writes in this first verse of his hymn. "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." There is peace for us in our pain. There is comfort for us in our conflict. To know this peace and comfort, however, we need to bring our needs to the Lord. He

³ (Words by Joseph M. Scriven, as found on HymnSite.com, <http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh526.sht>)

will minister to us in those times but we must come to Him. How long do we wait before coming? How many other things do we try before finally bowing our knee? God wants to comfort, heal, and provide, but He demands that we come to Him and tell Him about those needs.

To make our needs known requires that we confess our inability. It means recognizing that we do not have what is required to face our situation. Not everyone is willing to admit this. God is asking us to humble ourselves and confess our need to Him. He is asking that we declare our insufficiency and inability. He is asking that we come as a child recognizing our dependence on Him and His grace in our situation.

The apostle James tells his readers that “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6). Pride is a terrible thing in the eyes of the Lord. It will strip us of our blessings and keep us from God. It is pride that keeps us from asking for God’s blessings and guidance. We rush here and there in our own wisdom and strength. We feel that we are able to handle all that life brings to us. God does not always stop us, but we forfeit many blessings and privileges as a result.

Paul is telling us in this verse that if we want to know victory over the undue anxiety we face in life, we need to confess our need of God. We are to come to Him saying: “Lord, I have a need. I confess that I am not able to handle these matters on my own and I need your wisdom and strength. I come to You for the solution.” How God delights in this attitude of heart. How willing He is to minister to us when we come to Him in humility making our need known to Him.

The apostle Paul knew what it was like to come to the Lord in this attitude. God humbled him by putting a thorn in His

flesh to keep him dependent. Paul didn't like that thorn and prayed that God would set him free from it. When God refused to do so, Paul eventually came to a place where he not only accepted his weakness but boasted about it, for through it, the power of God was made more evident in his life:

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

This thorn in Paul's flesh kept him humble and dependent on God. Paul would often go to God recognizing and confessing his need. This is where God wanted him to be. All too often we live the Christian life in human strength and wisdom. God is asking us to live in His strength and by His wisdom. Here in Philippians 4:6 Paul tells us that if we want to know victory over the undue anxieties we feel in life, we must come to understand that we are insufficient for the task before us. We need the Lord, His blessing and His guidance. The apostle challenges us to confess that need to God and trust in His provision to face the struggles before us.

To make our needs known is not about telling God something He does not know. Rather, it is to confess our need to Him. God simply asks that we come to Him humbly confessing our need and calling out to Him for all that is necessary to overcome. He pours out His blessings on those who come to Him with this attitude. He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (see James 4:6). This is the challenge of Paul to us in this passage. When you are overwhelmed by anxiety, confess this to God. Come to Him and tell Him about your insufficiency for the task. Tell

Him how you need Him and His grace. Cry out for His help and support. Watch how He will respond with delight and minister to your need.

When anxieties overwhelm you, don't try to take everything on yourself. Humble yourself before God, confess your need, commit your problems to Him and watch what He does in response.

For Consideration:

- What does it mean to make our requests known to God? Is there anything we can tell God that He does not already know?
- Why do you suppose God wants us to come to Him confessing our need?
- Are there blessings we forfeit because we are not ready to confess our need or because we are too proud to admit those needs?
- Are there areas of your life that you need to submit to God? What are they? Have you been trying to do things in your own way not recognizing your need of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He knows everything about you and that nothing is hidden from Him.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times when you have not been able to confess how much you need Him. Ask Him to give you grace to understand and make your need known to Him.

- Take a moment now and consider the anxiety you feel in your life. Commit this to the Lord and ask Him to give you wisdom and strength to face it. Confess your need to Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to provide all we need to live in victory over the stress and trials of life.

THE PROMISE

8

A P E A C E S U R P A S S I N G U N D E R S T A N D I N G

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding ... (Philippians 4:7)

In the last few chapters we examined Paul's solution to anxiety-- let your requests be made known to God by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving (see verse 6). He now turns his attention to the result—God's peace will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Let's examine what Paul tells about the peace that results from committing our anxieties and concerns to the Lord. Paul tells us two things about the peace of God in verse 7:

1. It surpasses all understanding
2. It guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

In this chapter we will examine the first of these two characteristics of peace.

Paul told the Philippian believers that when they committed their anxieties to the Lord, they would know a peace

that surpassed all understanding. The Greek word used for peace refers to a quietness, rest, security or prosperity. Let's consider the peace that Paul speaks about in light of these words.

Quietness

The anxious mind is a mind filled with noise and confusion. Many voices cry out in such a mind. "How am I ever going to get through this?" "What will such and such a person think?" "Is God really going to take care of me?" All these voices speak at once, demanding attention. The noise of these voices is overwhelming and confusing and leads to worry, undue stress and inappropriate responses.

The peace of God will still those voices and bring quietness to our minds and hearts. It silences the doubts and questions and in its place there is a tranquility and calmness that comes from knowing that our God is in control of all things.

Rest

The anxious mind is not only a noisy mind –it is also a busy mind. It is a mind overworked with effort and thought. As Martha served the Lord and the disciples, she was very busy. She found herself taking on more than she could reasonably handle. Her mind and body were busy with undue effort and concern.

How many people have burned themselves out because they took on too much? Important relationships are ignored and priorities are dropped because anxiety has taken control. Anxiety allows no rest but drives us on until we have nothing more to give.

The peace Paul speaks about here is a freedom to rest. This does not mean that I sit back and do nothing. What it does mean, however, is that my efforts are tempered with the understanding that God is taking care of me and that He has a purpose in what I am facing. He will lead and guide me in what I need to do and keep me even if I fail. I can rest in this reality. I am free to let God be God and accomplish His purpose through me. I am free to trust in the strength He provides for each trial before me. I can sleep at night because I know that everything is under control. I can rest each day because I know the Lord will guide and strengthen me.

Security

The peace God provides also gives us a deep sense of security. Those who are able to commit their anxiety to the Lord know that He is bigger than any problem or trial that comes their way. They understand that nothing is outside of His care and control. Sin will not get the upper hand. Satan will not be victorious in the end. God's purpose will be accomplished.

What security this brings! We can have absolute confidence and trust in our God. He has our best interest at heart and is working all things out for our good and His glory. Who is bigger than our God? In the words of the apostle Paul:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

Could there possibly be more security than this? God is for us. He is my shepherd. He is my guard. He is my shield. As long as He is for me, I am perfectly safe. I live with peace in my heart.

Prosperity

The word Paul uses in this verse for peace carries with it also a sense of prosperity. I'm not using this word in a purely physical or material sense. Prosperity is not only seen in material blessings. It is also evident in the health of our minds and souls. Listen to what the apostle Paul told the Romans in Romans 8:28:

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Notice that Paul made it clear to the Romans that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Whatever happens to me, God will use for good in my life. Even the difficult things I must face will be used to shape me into the image of Christ. Not only is God bigger than the problems and anxieties I face but He promises to use them for my greater physical, spiritual and emotional good. In this, there is a great peace and confidence in God.

The peace God offers is a peace that brings quietness, rest, security and ultimate prosperity for those who commit their anxieties to Him. There is an important point we need to make here. While God will never change, our experience of His peace can change. Notice that verse 7 begins with the word "and." This simple word connects verse 7 with the truths we have examined in verse 6. In other words, if we follow the principles of verse 6 we can then experience the promise of verse 7. Commit your anxiety to the Lord "and" the peace of God will follow. We cannot miss what Paul is saying here. Not all believers will experience the fullness of peace offered by God because they

do not truly commit their anxieties to Him. They still choose to carry the burden themselves.

Notice, however, that the peace that God offers those who commit their anxieties to Him is a peace that surpasses all understanding. Let me say two things about this.

First, the peace offered here surpasses understanding in that it is a peace that is not of human origin. Even the unbeliever can know a certain measure of peace, but the peace offered by God here is not a human peace. It is a peace that comes as a result of the work of God's Spirit in our lives.

The second way this peace surpasses understanding is that it comes in the midst of trials and turmoil. The Lord does not remove the source of anxiety here—that has a purpose in our life. What He does do, however, is give us a peace in the midst of the problems we face. As we look at our life, we see the struggles and pain but we also experience the peace of God in this. How do you explain this rationally? Everything is in place to cause us great anxiety and yet deep inside us is a sense of the Lord's peace. We are not despairing. We have a hope. This does not make sense to the human mind. It is beyond human understanding.

Paul tells us that if we commit our anxieties to the Lord by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving then the Lord will give us a peace in our situation that is beyond anything we could ever understand. This peace will restore quietness and rest and bring great security and prosperity to our hearts and minds. Do you know this peace in your situation today?

For Consideration:

- The anxious mind is a noisy mind filled with questions and doubts. How does the peace of God quiet that noise?
- The anxious mind is a busy mind rushing from one thing to another. How does the peace of God give balance and temper this busyness?
- An anxious mind is an insecure mind. How does God's peace bring security to this insecurity?
- Is it possible for us to miss this peace of God in our lives? Can the believer still live with all his or her anxieties and not really know the peace God wants to offer? What is the requirement for knowing this peace of God?
- How does the peace God offers surpass understanding?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider the things that bring you anxiety in life. Ask the Lord to give you a quietness, rest and security in these things. Thank Him that He will use all these things for your good.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have allowed your anxieties to overwhelm you and control your thoughts and actions. Take a moment now to surrender your cares to Him asking for His direction and peace.
- Thank the Lord that while He does not always take away our struggles, He still gives us peace in the midst of them.

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PEACE THAT GUARDS OUR HEARTS AND MINDS

And the peace of God ... will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7)

We have already examined what Paul has said about the peace of God that surpassed all understanding. Paul goes on in verse 7 to share another aspect of the peace that God promises those who cast their anxiety on Him. Here in the second part of verse 7 he tells us that this peace will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

The word “guard” is a military term. It is the word used to speak of a soldier who has been given the responsibility to watch for enemy movements. His task was to protect a city or camp from invasion and keep the inhabitants safe. The guard took this responsibility seriously. He would remain alert all night as he watched for any sign of invasion or hostility. If the enemy were to come, he would stand against them to protect the city.

Paul compares the peace God gives to a military guard. Anxiety is the enemy that comes to remove our peace and confidence in God. This peace is not just a passive feeling of tranquility or calmness. It is a soldier that takes his stand against anything that would disrupt our rest and reliance on God. The peace God gives jealously protects us against undue anxiety that would lead us away from trust in God.

Our role is to pray and let our requests be made known to God. Our role is to call out to God and recognize our need. He responds from heaven with His peace. This peace is a gift of God given to us in our anxiety. God comes to our aid and sets His peace up as a guard to protect and defend us against the noise and confusion that fills our minds. This peace aggressively searches out the enemy and forces him out.

The peace God gives is not something we have to work for, nor is it something that results from our human efforts. It is the gift of God given in response to prayer. There are countless courses being offered to help people deal with stress and anxiety. Even the unbeliever can learn relaxation techniques and how to manage stress. While these courses may be helpful, this is not what Paul is speaking about here. The peace God gives is the fruit of the Spirit's work in us. It defies human logic and cannot be reproduced by human effort.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:7 that this peace will guard two things. First, it will guard our hearts and second, it will guard our minds. Let's consider this briefly.

First, the peace God gives guards our heart. Physically, the heart and the mind are quite easy to distinguish. It is not so easy to distinguish them, however, in a spiritual or

emotional sense. The heart is the place of motives and intentions. To love someone with all our heart is to love them with sincerity. The Lord God spoke of this when He said through Isaiah:

And the Lord said: Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men. (Isaiah 29:13)

Notice that in Isaiah's day God's people did all the right things but they did not do so with sincerity and purity of heart. When the Lord gives us peace as a guard for our heart, He does so to maintain the purity and integrity of our motives and intentions toward Him. How easy it is, in times of great stress and anxiety, to lose something of our passion and desire for God. Anxiety can draw our attention away from Him and cause us to doubt His care and provision. Ultimately, it can cause us to distance ourselves from God or to lose something of the sincerity of our desire for Him.

Jesus speaks of the heart as the place where we store our greatest treasures.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:21)

What is stored in our heart will affect the priorities we have in life. When a man or woman treasures money, this will become the priority for his or her life. Whatever we store in our heart becomes the motivation and incentive for what we do. There are times, however, when our treasures lose something of their appeal. Circumstances in life may turn us away from the things we once treasured. A husband may lose something of his passion for his wife and family

because his focus changes to his work or ministry. A believer may lose something his or her desire for God because of the anxieties and cares that begin to choke out their passion.

It is the desire of God that our hearts be committed to Him. While He does not force Himself on us, when we cry out to Him in our anxiety and trouble, He comes to our aid. He pours out His Spirit and gives us peace. His peace jealously guards our hearts lest they become weary and cluttered, losing their attraction and passion for Him. There in the peace of God our hearts are able to find the rest they need. In this peace our hearts are able to reflect on the beauty of our Saviour and Lord. His peace guards our heart to keep it in love with Him and seeking after Him.

Secondly, God not only gives His peace to keep our hearts but also our minds. The mind is often seen as the seat of our thoughts. Anxiety is not physical; though it can cause physical symptoms. The entry point for anxiety is the mind. It is in the mind that the greatest impact of anxiety can be felt. Anxiety troubles the mind causing stress and worry. It distorts the reality of a problem by exaggeration and despair.

The peace God gives comes to guard our minds against the falsehood and confusion caused by anxiety. Like a military guard, it sets up its defenses against the exaggerations and lies of the enemy. It comforts our troubled thoughts with the truth of God's Word. It confronts the lies we have believed by reminding us of the character of God and His care for us. This peace renews our mind and helps us to see things in proper perspective again. In light of who God is and the wonderful promises He has given, these anxieties seem to lose something of their power. It is the

desire of God to guard the thoughts of our mind so that they are kept in the truth of who He is.

How troubling this world can be for those who do not know the truth about a personal God who cares for them and has their best interests at heart. How thankful we need to be that God is concerned about these troubling thoughts and will set up His peace in our minds to guard and protect them. His peace allows us to think clearly again and releases us from the lies and exaggerations of the enemy.

There is one final detail we need to see here. Paul tells us that this peace of God will guard our hearts and minds “in Christ Jesus.” We cannot miss this point. What does it mean for our heart and minds to be guarded in Christ Jesus? There are several points we need to make about this.

First, to be in Jesus has to do with being in tune with Him and His purpose for our lives. The peace God gives to us keeps our heart and mind in tune with Christ and His purpose. When the peace of God rules in our heart, we are able to surrender fully to the plan the Lord Jesus has for our lives. It is true that sometimes that plan will carry us through deep valleys and difficult struggles. He went to the cross and laid down His life for us. He calls us to take up our cross as well. How do we live in the reality of that command and carry out the call of Christ? Paul tells us that God gives us His peace to guard our hearts and minds so that we can continue to walk in harmony with the purpose for which Christ died.

To be in Christ, secondly, has to do with maintaining a relationship and intimacy with Christ. How often the things of this world seek to draw us away from fellowship with Christ. They distract us and bombard our minds with other ideas or attractions. The peace of God guards our minds

and hearts so that they find contentment in Christ and seek Him alone. In that peace we find what our souls have longed for. In that peace we find rest and purpose—this is where we want to be.

To be in Christ also has to do with knowing His enabling in our lives. Like a branch draws its energy from the trunk, so we too find our strength and wisdom in our Lord. One of the temptations for those facing anxiety is to take matters into their own hands. Anxiety is not very patient. It does not wait on the Lord but steps out in human strength to resolve its problems. This only leads to more problems. The peace of God that guards our hearts and minds enables us to trust in God and His work. It keeps us in a place of dependence on Christ for our every need. With God's peace guarding our hearts and minds, we remain connected to the source of our strength and power. We are able to rest in His purpose. We are able to trust in His wisdom. We are able to fellowship with Him.

The peace of God guards our hearts in Christ. That is to say, the purpose of this peace is to keep us in tune with Christ, walking in intimacy with Him and knowing His power to conquer the enemy. Anxiety seeks to distract us and separate us from Christ, His provision and care. God's peace will guard us and keep us in Christ.

It is the great purpose of God to keep us in tune with His purpose. He gives His peace in response to our cry to guard our hearts and minds and keep them in Christ Jesus. There we can live in security and intimacy. May we know this peace in whatever situation we find ourselves in today.

For Consideration:

- How does God's peace guard us?
- Why does our heart need to be guarded? How does the peace of God guard our hearts?
- Why does our mind need to be guarded? How does the peace of God guard our minds?
- What does it mean to be guarded in Christ Jesus? What temptations seek to draw us away from Christ?
- What is the difference between the peace the world seeks and the peace that comes from God to guard our hearts and minds?

For Prayer:

- Do you feel that your mind and heart has been affected by anxiety? Take a moment to ask the Lord to give you His peace to guard them in Christ.
- Thank the Lord for His great desire to keep your heart and mind in Christ. Thank Him for His peace that has kept you in times of great anxiety.
- Ask the Lord to give you victory over the many temptations in this world. Ask Him to help you to walk daily in His peace so that you can overcome.
- Thank the Lord for the peace and satisfaction He gives to your mind and heart as they rest in Him.

A FINAL WORD

I want to conclude this study of Philippians 4:5-7 with a personal word. A number of years ago I was diagnosed with a medical anxiety disorder so this topic is quite personal to me. In many ways the disorder was not evident to most people who knew me. On the outside I appeared to be very calm and collected. Inside, however, my mind was always thinking. I had a low tolerance for confusion. I found myself concerned about a variety of things. Deadlines caused me undue stress. Physically, this resulted in muscle tension, stomach problems and an ongoing low-grade headache. It ultimately led to depression.

In recent years I have committed this anxiety to the Lord and have seen Him give me many victories. I have also seen Him use it for His greater glory. The need for clarity has driven me in this writing ministry. Publishers gave up putting deadlines on me because I was motivated to get the work done without the deadline. It has also driven me to be disciplined in the use of my time enabling me to get huge amounts of work done.

I often think of Paul who asked the Lord to remove the "thorn in his flesh." God refused to do so and told him that

He would use it to bring greater glory to His name. Paul stopped asking the Lord to remove this thorn and instead began to praise Him for how He was using what many thought to be a handicap to accomplish such good for the spread of the gospel.

Anxiety is a normal part of life. Paul, who wrote this letter, spoke of the anxieties he had for the churches under his care. This stirring of anxiety in us is often a means the Lord uses to cast us on His care. He will use anxiety to motivate us to do something about a given situation. Paul's anxiety for the church drove him to pray and write letters addressing particular situations the believers were facing.

Anxieties come in various forms. We have all met people who are "passionate" about a certain thing. In other words, they care very deeply about something and are highly motivated to do something about it. Some have a very intense personality. Others give themselves recklessly and selflessly to things they are interested in. What would life be like without passion and intense devotion? What would our church be like without a deep concern or passion about the kingdom of God? Is there really a difference between this passion, intensity, and selfless devotion and the anxiety for righteousness and God's kingdom that Paul speaks about?

Is it possible for a parent to not feel anxiety about a son or daughter going out into the world for the first time? Is it possible for a pastor not to feel some sort of anxiety for the condition of his flock? Should we not be anxious about the state of our loved ones without Christ? Can I watch my husband or wife lying on a sick bed and not have any anxious thoughts about their life?

Can I expect to go through life, without ever having a concern or feeling any kind of stress and strain? Jesus himself, cried out in deep agony. His mind was troubled. Consider what John tells us about Jesus in John 13:21:

After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."

Just before His crucifixion the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father. Listen to His prayer in John 12:27:

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

It is quite clear from these verses that the Lord Jesus knew what it was like to be troubled in His spirit. He felt the emotional pain of what was about to happen.

Paul is not telling us that we should never experience anxiety in our lives. He tells us that we are not to "be" anxious. To "be" anxious is to give in to anxiety and allow it to control us. To "be" anxious is to live life as if God were not in control. To "be" anxious is to refuse the strength and comfort the Lord provides and to walk away from His provision. It is to be paralysed by our fears and unable to step out in faith.

Peter tells us that we are to cast all our anxieties on the Lord because He cares for us (see 1 Peter 5:7). The fact that believers need to cast these anxieties on the Lord shows us that they will experience them in their lives. What Peter is telling us here, however, is that we are to take these anxieties and give them to the Lord. We are to trust Him with them and rely on His enabling to get through.

You may have an anxious type of personality. You may feel things very deeply and carry the burdens of others on your shoulders. The question for us here is what will you do with these cares and anxieties? Will you carry them yourself or will you take them to the Lord? Some people will have a greater challenge to do this than others. I have met individuals whose personality is such that it seems like they do not have a care in the world. Some people seem to adjust easily to any situation while others have a difficult time with any kind of change. While our personalities are often different and we feel things differently, the solution still remains. We are to take our anxieties and bring them to the Lord. We are to learn to rely on Him in whatever situation life presents. If you have an anxious type of personality, you may have to come more often to the Lord for help. In my case, I have to do this often throughout the day. I have to pray: "Lord, this is Yours, help me. Give me patience. Let me trust what You are doing. Help me not to take it on myself." God will use this anxiety to keep you dependent. What is key here, however, is that we continue to bring these anxieties to Him and trust in His enabling and peace.

Philippians 4:5-7 is a reminder to us. While we all experience anxiety in life, we don't have to be overcome by it. Paul shows us that there is a solution. By prayer, supplication, with thanksgiving we are to commit these cares to Him. He promises that God's peace will guard our hearts and minds and keep them in the place of deep fellowship and intimacy with Christ. May this be our experience today.

For Consideration:

- What are the various forms anxiety takes in our lives?
- Is it wrong to feel troubled or anxious? Consider what Jesus felt in John 12:27 and John 13:21.
- What is the difference between feeling anxiety and being anxious?
- What is Paul's solution to anxiety?
- Can God use anxiety in our lives for good? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you grace to commit your troubles and anxieties to Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is always there for us and will keep us and give us His peace in whatever trouble we find ourselves.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have surrendered to anxiety and not committed your way to Him.
- Ask the Lord to use the anxiety of life to draw you closer to Him.

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