

## Joyful Realities Of Christ's Lordship: Part 2

*Philippians 4:4-9*

**Introduction:** "Be afraid...be very afraid" seems to be the current watchword. We are made aware of the fact that people are after our house, kids, identity, and money, so we need to make sure we have better locks, alarms, insurance, and someone checking our credit score and credit card. In a globalized culture the depravity of man is constantly on full display and we realize that no one is safe from the evil all around us. Even in Simi Valley, we are living longer, pride ourselves on being "one of the safest big cities" in America, and have tons of choices in life (can you say Chik Fil A). But it is also known that all the sinful effects are here, just in a more sanitized, cleaner way. In all of this, we realize there is much to be afraid of, much to worry about, and our anxiety can grow. Will our kids be safe? Will our country implode? Will we have enough for retirement? How long will we live? Will I ever feel normal? Will we face persecution?

This morning we want to dig in on this key verse and idea ***do not be anxious for anything***. Worry and anxiety are real, just as real as fear, and the Bible always addresses what is real in our life, mind, and hearts. Anxiety is hard. Anxiety is pervasive. Anxiety is hard to talk about, and sometimes harder to understand. But the answer to our cessation of sin, like pride, selfishness, and yes, worry, is NEVER to simply say "stop it", but to understand the core realities so we can fight against it properly. In this closing chapter, Paul addresses **two key realities** that transcend how much we have or what **time in history** we live in. We are called to turn away from **worry** and to walk in **contentment**, and all of this is not only a matter of joy but also a matter of how the world sees gospel that brings that joy.

We looked last week at the fact that we are to **stand firm in the Lord**, which signaled two foundational principles. 1) Because of our standing in the present and the future in the work of Jesus Christ, knowing that we can know Him and be found in Him, meaning we anticipate the new bodies that will come in the resurrection which will be fit for eternity, we can be **stable in the midst of a turbulent world**. We have hope and answers to the longing questions of life, and that stability means we are not tossed about by the unknowns and uncontrollable like the rest of the world 2) Jesus is Lord. He not only was in the **form of God, He took on the form of a servant**, willingly dying on the cross, being vindicated by His Father, rising from the dead and conquering sin and death, and God gave Him the name that is above every name (*Lord*), so that everyone, either now or in the future, will bow their knee to Him. Jesus Lordship does not mean slavish duty but delightful obedience, freeing us to live with hope and joy. We are to **stand firm in the Lord** (4:1), **agree in the Lord** (4:2), **rejoice in the Lord** (4:3), knowing that the **Lord is near** (4:5), with Christ Jesus guarding our minds and hearts (4:7). Now we will take all of this, together with how we think (8) and how we practice what we believe (9) into our battle with anxiety.

### **Gracious Responses: *The Lord is Near* (5)**

*Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. **The Lord is at hand***

#### **Showing Grace toward others**

An extension of joy results in how we treat others, especially those that are difficult, who treat us badly or even desire to do us harm. In the church of Philippi, they not only dealt with conflict from within, but false teachers and suffering outside (Phil. 1:28). Reasonableness, or gentleness, is a tough word to capture in English, but a good attempt is: *A humble, patient, steadfastness which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace and maltreatment, without hatred and malice, trusting God in spite of it all.* How we

respond to those who treat us poorly makes all the difference in our belief that God is good and glorious and that we actually want other people to taste of it.

None of us like being treated poorly when we do what it right. We want to fight for our rights, for fair treatment, for justice. But Peter dealt with this in terms of servants and masters in 1 Peter:

*For this is a gracious thing, when, **mindful of God**, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But **if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.** For to this you been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an **example, so that you might follow in His steps.**" (3:19-21)*

### Established hearts

What is our reality in all of this, both in suffering with graciousness and anxiety to follow? The Lord is near. This is true in two foundational ways. He is near **spatially**, meaning He is with us by the Spirit. "*The nearness of God is my good.*" (Psalm 73:28; 34:18, 75:1). He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5 cf. Josh 1:5). He has given the Holy Spirit Who will assure us and guide us. This means that whatever we are going through, it is NOT because God does not care nor does it mean He has checked out, but is walking with us through it.

Secondly, we know He is near in His return, as we talked about last week. We know that there is an end to the pain and suffering, disappointment and sorrow we face in this world. We know that everyone will one day face perfect justice, that no one gets away with anything, and God will bring vindication. He not only walks us through, but reminds us that He will return and make it all right. That is why James said, "**You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.**" (5:8). We can respond patiently with others, even when they treat us wrong, knowing that there is an end to what we have to endure.

### Anxiety Fighting Prayer: *Minds guarded in Christ Jesus* (6-7)

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your mind **in Christ Jesus.***

### Antidote for Anxiety

Finally, Paul dealt with the issue that plagued the church then and the church now. He gave an all inclusive command in the negative sense, "**Do not be anxious for or about anything.**" Yikes. That not only is all-encompassing, but is a command to follow with no wiggle room. The Bible never gives commands in a vacuum but deals with the true realities of life. Anxiety is a real response, and has very little to do with external circumstances in this sense. In this time of writing, the church was anxious about Paul's future and about their own suffering, where we do not have those extremes, yet our response in anxiety is the same. The word **anxiety** means *to be pulled in different directions*, where our heart and mind are at odds. So where does **anxiety come from?**

- **Lack of Control** - We all want to be in control, whether that is our circumstances, people in our life, or to know the future. We want to be able to control outcomes, like physical well-being, our kids success, or a job. Anxiety comes when we **demand to know the future, have answers now that God has not promised to give us.** When we do not get the answers we demand, or do not receive them in the time we want them, anxiety kicks in.

- **Lack of Assurance of the Future** - This is a corollary of the first, but when we do not find rest and comfort of our future with Christ, we dread the day to come. The loss of assurance causes us to cling to the present, clutching for something tangible rather than believing by faith.
- **Fear** - We are called to fear God, but there is another kind of fear. Fear of failure, loss, pain, or physical suffering can cause us to react negatively in the present. Some have gone through something traumatic which causes us to shrink back and be fearful of situations, people, or the unknown. Fear is real. It is most oft commanded reaction to avoid in Scripture, to FEAR NOT (see Psalm 58:3-4 - "*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you, In God, whose Word I praise, in God I trust; I shall **not be afraid**. What can flesh do to me?*")
- **Lack of understanding of purpose or intention** - When there is a lack of clarity on what God is doing, if He is good, we react in self-trust rather than dependency on Him.

The core of all of these: anxiety is a conflict of our faith and trust in God, and faith in hard. That is why we are to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12). Anxiety clearly has **physical consequences and symptoms**, as well as **physical symptoms can enhance our worry**. Our worry can cause headaches, ulcers, back pains, mess with our digestion, our thinking, and cause debilitating attacks. We can feel trapped in our own minds, unable to function in social situations, and given over to fear. In spite of all of this we must recognize that all of the above causes are NOT DIRECTLY PHYSICAL, so the solutions ultimately are not physical, but can be helped physically. In other words, exercise, sleep, diet and medication can help us with physical symptoms and can even help us think clearly to get to the core, but no amount of physical treatment can cure anxiety.

### Supernatural Peace

Notice that the cure for anxiety that Paul offers is not a change of circumstance, venue, or a desire to be taken out of suffering. It is to bear up under the pressure with the resources God gives us graciously and bountifully.

- **Prayer** - *If we are going to fight against anxiety in anything we must pray about everything.* We can so easily undersell the necessity of prayer, not because we have exhausted a pursuit of God but because we do not believe it will be effective. Paul gave **three descriptions of prayer** to make sure that we engaged in it, but also *properly in it*. The first description is **prayer** where we focus on the adoration of God, His greatness and majesty. This is always a safe and reasonable place to start, before we begin to pour out our hearts. We must remember that we believe and love the One who can hear and our prayer and respond. We also make **supplications, requests**, communicating our need to God who already knows but still wants us to talk to Him. Most of us have someone who we know is safe and wise to talk to (parent, friend, spouse). God delights when we let our needs known to Him. This type of prayer recognizes **our utter dependence on and trust in God**.

But we also make these known with **thanksgiving**. This is so important in our prayer. Our prayers can far too often read like a doctors clipboard or my kids Christmas wish list: "I want this and this, and fix this and this physical thing." We treat God like a genie, rubbing the lamp and expecting God to fix it all the way we want it. **Thanksgiving** keeps us from focusing on ourselves in prayer and to move our perspective on who God is and what He is accomplishing.

Thanksgiving is an explicit acknowledgement of dependence, a recognition that **everything** comes as a gift, the verbalization before God of His goodness and generosity. It is our basic posture as a believer and is the proper context for petitioning God. It puts both prayer and life

into proper theological perspective. Prayer does not ensure our circumstances will change, and it is not a magic fix, but there is no moving away from anxiety without it.

- **Peace** - What we really need to help us through worry and anxiety? Something supernatural. The peace that God brings through Jesus Christ surpasses understanding (science cannot explain it) and is strong enough to **guard** our minds and hearts. The word guard is a military grade term, a soldier that will not let the enemy through. The source of our worry is NOT outside of us but inside, and so we need something that will guard our **minds and hearts**, the control center where anxiety, fear, and worry is produced. Christ will guard **our thinking AND our emotions** that are governed by our mind and heart. **Prayer** is the conduit to this peace, and God is the giver with Jesus being the supplier. Notice that nothing here speaks of a changing of how we feel, or if pain goes away, or that we are told what will happen tomorrow. But we will have **peace, since fear fights against our joy today**. This is the same type of prayer Paul prayed for the Ephesian church to understand the **love of Jesus**:

*"...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and **to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge**, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Eph. 3:17-19*

- **Proper View of Reality** - We have to have a proper view of life, God, our lives in this fallen world, and our future. Prayer is **anti-entitlement**. It recognizes that life may not always go according to our plans or have the desired outcome we crave.

There is an poignant story in Daniel 6, where Daniel had risen the ranks Babylon with such a reputation that the King planned to set him over the whole kingdom (6:3), which prompted his jealous enemies to look for fodder to complain about him. They could find none. So his enemies tricked the king to sign into law an edict that stated anyone who **makes petition** to any god other than the king should be put in the lion's den. After the king signed Daniel's death warrant, Daniel's response was:

*When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and **prayed and gave thanks** before his God, **as he had previously done**. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel **making petition and plea before his God**." Daniel 6:10-11*

A few things to point out. 1) Daniel prayed, made petition, and thanked God as a normal pattern and rhythm of prayer. 2) He did not overreact at the edict, but continued as he had done for years. In other words, prayer was NOT simply reactive but a repetitive pattern of a committed life. 3) Daniel faced life and death with **peace**. Daniel was calm in the lions den. The king could not sleep (6:18).

But that was Daniel. That was an extreme case. What about my life? Prayer, like any discipline, has to be cultivated. Often, in seeking instant answers or gratification, we get into the short sighted pattern of pray ---- seemingly no response ----- stop praying. or we approach prayer like God is a cosmic genie there to answer our requests at our beck and call (Will Smith, the new genie, really?). Since the peace of God is **supernatural, going beyond understanding**, we must exercise faith, perseverance, and waiting on the Lord, desiring Him to **change us even more than our circumstances**. God's peace does not come because He answers according to our wishes, but because His peace totally transcends our merely human way of perceiving the world. Anxiety rules when our unbelieving mind cannot think higher than itself, so we must elevate our thinking in prayer through Christ's protection.

Most who have battled anxiety at any level have repeated these verses, often without the results hoped for. The problem we have is that we far too quickly and easily take things out of context, which not only leads to misinterpretation, but also leaves us missing the holistic message. When we isolate only verses 6-7, or only 4-7, we miss key ingredients in our fight against anxiety. They are: **our thinking and our practice.**

**Battleground of our Mind: Thinking on what is True (4:8)**

*Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things.***

Dr. Walter Cavert reported a survey on worry that indicated that only 8% of the things people worried about were true matters of concern, where 92% were either imaginary, never happened, or involved matters over which people had no control.<sup>1</sup> Satan is a liar (John 8:44), who seeks to deceive, twist, and move us down a road where we are not sure what or who to trust. This is exactly what he did with Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:1ff), twisting the Truth in a way that made sin seem good, right, and justifiable. That is why Jesus guards our minds and hearts, since the battle for so much begins and ends there.

Two principles stand out here. **First**, the list he offers is not *exhaustive* and it is not necessarily distinctly Christian. There is a strong rhetorical tone here, where Paul writes with a rhythm, repeating the phrase "whatever is" over and over, and using the last two phrases to reinforce the first six. It is the excellence and worthy of praise that help see the first grouping in light of **Christ, rather than moralistic phrases.** The focus is on what is true, fighting against those things that are untrue or only partially true. Things that are worthy of respect, right, pure, inherently lovely to God, and what is highly regarded are things to cling to. It is **training our minds to see reality through the lens of God's truth, not through the fuzzy picture deception paints.**

**Second**, Paul switches the word he's been using the whole book for "think" for another one (*logizomai*), which means to "take account of", to contemplate these things. The word is put into a tense which means a continual thinking and evaluation. We have so much content going into our minds each day, from news, advice, commentary, and what James would call worldly wisdom. Erin and I were laughing about the weight loss advice we hear: *focus on yourself, you deserve it, love yourself.* Some of this can be ok in a proper context, while others are simply worldly trash in the messed up scenario Eve found herself in with the serpent. So we must think about the things that are excellent, true, and pure. We must sift through the piles of deceptive, self-help, man-centered deception that give no true hope.

Again, this is not easy and takes commitment to know God through His Word, and in so doing we can begin to see the lie. So we must begin to pray properly and think properly, which leads to the last command: put these things into practice.

**Putting it into Practice: Learning and Leaning (9)**

*What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me ---**practice these things, and the peace of God will be with you.***

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, "Be Joyful; It beats being happy", p.116

Knowing the truth is not enough. We must, by the grace God provides, the power of the Spirit, and the faith given by God, put into practice what we know to be true. In doing this, we must implement both **learning and leaning**.

- **Learning** - Notice that Paul points to himself again (3:17) as an example to follow. Paul had much to be worried about: death was of high potential, would he be let out of house prison, when would he ever be free, what about his reputation that had taken a hit by those opposing him, and false teachers potentially leading believers in the church astray. What was his response to all of this?

**He chose to rejoice** (1:18-19; 2:17; 4:4), not because it was easy or natural, but because it was right and possible. Joy is the antidote of fear and anxiety. He chose to rejoice in whatever circumstance, suffering, physical pain or strain he found himself in. Why?

**He strove to know Christ** - (3:12) - Because Christ is Lord, because Christ died and rose, because He chose Paul, Paul's mindset changed from thinking about his life in this world to straining and pressing to know Christ

**He was assured of the end** (3:11; 21) - He knew the end was going to be glorious. Its why Jim could go confidently into death, even in pain. He was ready to see Jesus.

- **Leaning** - In verse 4:7 we are promised the peace of God that comes through prayer by Christ Jesus. Here, we are promised the **God of peace will be WITH US!** He is with us. He is NOT distant. He walks us through our greatest fears like a loving dad. He does not just protect us and give us peace, He gives us Himself. You are not alone. Someone always understands because He is with you, knows how you are feeling, knows what is going on in your head.

So here it is this morning. Do you know the God who gives peace because you know the God of peace? Have you yielded your life, repented of your sin, asked for forgiveness, and turned to follow Christ? Do you Jesus Christ as Savior who died on the cross and rose again, and also Lord who owns your life? The peace that we crave is supernatural and comes through Jesus Christ alone, and He brings us to God the Father. Today is the day of salvation. Today is a day where you can move from hopeless to hopeful, from fearful to peaceful, from full of worry to full of joy. The answer to all of this is Jesus Christ, who loved us so much He willingly took our place on the cross so we could live truly, knowing Him and being with Him eternally.