

## DON'T BE ANXIOUS PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

One of my favorite stories in the Bible occurred when Jehoshaphat was King of Judah. Three neighboring countries—the Ammonites, Moabites, and Meunites—decided to form an alliance to invade Judah in order to annihilate them and possess their land. When it was reported to Jehoshaphat that a great multitude was advancing against them, we are told that he was afraid, and set his face to seek the LORD (2 Chron. 20:3). But he also gathered to Jerusalem all the people of Judah from every town, including children and infants, in order to fast and pray together about their desperate situation.

Then Jehoshaphat led the people in prayer, during which he recounted God's absolute sovereignty, His omnipotence, His trustworthiness, His faithfulness, and His promises to His covenant people. And he closed that prayer with these words: *"We are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you"* (2 Chron. 20:12).

There are times in life when we have felt (or will feel) desperate. There are or will be occasions when we are forced to face some kind of circumstance or crisis which we are powerless to overcome—a circumstance or crisis that we have neither the strength, the solutions, or the resources to alter.

That's not a good feeling. Nobody likes to feel desperate. But we as Americans, who pride ourselves on our ingenuity and resourcefulness, are particularly averse to this feeling, especially in the last few generations. So averse to feeling desperate are we that we have implemented countless safeguards and contingency plans, so we don't *have* to feel desperate, or powerless, or helpless.

And yet, times of desperation and uncertainty are part of life in this fallen world. The worldwide pandemic from the Corona Virus is certainly being experienced by a lot of people in the world in this way. Many who live in China, or Italy, or Iran, or some other hot spot in the world are facing this kind of desperation even now.

I don't presume to know how each of you are feeling about the Corona Virus and its threat to you or your loved ones. I don't presume to know how each of you feel about the extreme measures that are being taken by our government to prevent its spread. But I think I can safely assume that some are concerned, and some might even be downright fearful.

One of the things that we as pastors and elders would like to do during this pandemic is to shepherd our congregation through this by encouraging us to seek the Lord together so that we can understand how He would want us to respond to this crisis in our personal lives, in our families, as a church, in our communities, and even in other places of the world. I am acutely aware that what will happen among *us* at EBC in the next few weeks has global implications, with our missionaries around the world, and also with events like the *ELLS International* conferences in Malawi scheduled at the end of April in which more than seven hundred pastors are registered.

And I believe the appropriate starting place is the same for us as it was for Jehoshaphat. To acknowledge that God is absolutely sovereign, omnipotent, trustworthy, and faithful. And I also believe it is appropriate to declare, *"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you"* (2 Chron. 20:12).

I want to direct our attention to a familiar passage near the end of Paul's letter to the Philippians. Writing from a jail cell in Rome where he was tethered to a Roman guard, Paul writes in chapter 4, **verses 4-7.** *<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let*

*your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Paul is in prison for preaching the gospel. He is writing to people who were also experiencing a fair amount of persecution of their own because of their faith. And so, these admonitions are given in the context of people being legitimately concerned about their safety, their security, their livelihood, their well-being. This was written in the context of unpleasant and unpredictable circumstances.

But Paul unapologetically says in **verse 6a**. *“Do not be anxious about anything...”* The word “anxious” is a synonym for “worry”, and it means to be unduly concerned. It is apprehension about possible danger, a brooding fear that something bad might happen...to yourself, your children, your spouse, your business, your job security, your finances, your home, your health, your reputation, your friendships, your living situation.

Of course, all these things are important to us and so we naturally think about them a lot. It’s also natural *and* appropriate when we think about these things to consider risks and dangers, to take precautions, and to plan and invest wisely. Concern is good, concern is responsible.

But notice Paul says that *worry* is *never* appropriate. He says, “Do not be anxious *about anything*.” When we cross that line into fretting about things or brooding or obsessing over things, then we’ve gone too far. And that goes for anything, no matter how important it is or how valuable it is, including our health, our children, our finances. Worrying is never good, and it is never appropriate for a Christian.

And this is not merely because worry is so fruitless and unproductive. It’s because worry is an evidence that the worrier has excluded God from the matter. It is practical atheism—living as though God doesn’t exist, or is not involved, or not interested, or not capable of taking care of things. In the words of one self-professed chronic worrier, “Every time I surrender to worry I am advertising the unreliability of God (Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*, 151).

Worry is succumbing to a lie. Either the lie that God does not care about the things that are of concern to us, or that God cannot adequately take care of the things that are of concern to us, or that God *won’t* take care of the things that are of concern to us. In any case, worry is a lack of trust in His love, His sovereignty, and His power.

God intended that *trust* be the foundation of our relationship with Him. Everything is built on trust, and all the benefits of our relationship are the result of trust. When we don’t trust God our relationship is shallow and superficial, and we become vulnerable to the frustrating and futile inclinations of trying to figure things out on our own, trying to take matters into our own hands, trying to determine the outcome.

Consequently, we can either succumb to an over-confident, egotistical self-reliance, or we can succumb to worry. Both are the result of believing the same lies, and both are equally destructive.

The antidote to worry is trust, and the practical outworking of trust is prayer. And so, Paul would say, **verse 6**. *<sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in **everything** by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

Paul makes it clear that God is interested in *all* our requests. When Jesus told His disciples how to pray, He gave a model prayer that covered almost everything, from praying

that His kingdom would come, to praying for daily bread. There is nothing in which He is not interested.

God invites us to come to Him with global matters such as the Corona Virus crisis, and He wants us to come to Him with personal matters, such as the headache I now have. He wants us to come to Him with our desires for our children, for our marriages, our business, our health, our finances, our relationships, our loved ones, our future, our ministries, our jobs...for anything and everything.

Prayer is the way we unburden ourselves; it is the way we “cast all our anxiety upon God” (1 Pet. 5:7). And, unlike worry, which is fruitless and unproductive, prayer is by far the most profitable and productive thing we can do. Because we are laying our requests in the hands of an all-powerful God who loves us and wants what is best for us.

When Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah fasted and prayed before the LORD for their preservation and safety from a massive army that had come to annihilate them, God answered in a most remarkable way. First, while they were praying and seeking the LORD, He sent a prophet with this message: *“Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, ‘Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God’s... <sup>17</sup> You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.’ Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the LORD will be with you.”*

And the specific way that God chose to deliver Judah on this occasion was to send men who would sing God’s praises on the battlefield. SING! Not fight...SING! And God defeated the armies by having them turn on each other, and not a single man, woman or child from Judah was injured.

In Philippians Paul urges us to immerse our prayers for deliverance with thanksgiving. He says, *“...but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God.”*

Prayer is the means by which we communicate with God; thankfulness is the attitude that ought to accompany those prayers. Because thankfulness actually *builds* trust. Someone said it this way: “Gratitude lays out the planks of trust. I can walk the planks—from known to unknown—and know: He holds.” (Voskamp, 152).

Think about it this way: when I am tempted to fear, when I am tempted to doubt, when I am tempted to take matters into my own hands by worrying, but I choose instead to present that matter to God with thanksgiving I am laying a plank that is building a bridge over that problem.

Gratitude gives birth to trust. And so, as we immerse our prayers with thanksgiving, we get to experience the benefits of trust. Joy is one, verse 4. A spirit of reasonableness and is another, verse 5. And indescribable peace is another, **verse 7**. *<sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

The “and” at the beginning of verse 7 is more important than it looks. It gives the *result* of the thankful prayer that Paul has described in verse 6. So, it could be translated, “Then the peace of God...” or “When you do the peace of God...”

Please notice that this peace not only stands in contrast to the anxiety mentioned in verse 6, it stands in contrast to the peace offered by our world. Insurance companies offer peace. So do investment companies, and firearm manufacturers, and all kinds of other manmade commodities.

But the peace of God is totally different. It is an inner contentment supplied by God Himself that defies unpredictable circumstances and danger and vulnerability. Paul says it transcends all understanding. Think about this: The expected response to the persecution the Philippians were experiencing is anxiety. But instead God supplies a peace, a peace that guards their hearts and minds.

The term “guard” is a figure of speech drawn from the arena of conflict and is frequently used to refer to the action of a military garrison stationed inside a city. The idea is that this peace is actually acting as a covering, shielding us from those intrusive thoughts that can sabotage our joy and contentment, protecting us from those chilling whispers that would introduce paralyzing fear into our lives.

This peace is not only God’s blessing for a contented state of mind, it is God’s protection against those forces that would rob us of our joy and hope and peace.

As we close our time together, I want to suggest a couple of very practical things we can do to apply this passage.

First, if you tend to worry it’s important that you acknowledge it and own it and not minimize it by calling it “concern.” Call it what it is, confess it to God, and let Him begin His gracious and merciful process of removing it from your life. He wants to. And it’s not too late, even if you have been a worrier for 70 years.

Second, if you are a worrier, you need to find a different coping mechanism to dealing with your fears, because your default mode has been to succumb to worry. I would suggest a couple of things. First, carry with you some verses, or better yet, memorize some verses that proclaim the promises of God.

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge Him,  
and He will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5,6).*

*“God has said, ‘Never will I leave you;  
never will I forsake you.’  
So we say with confidence,  
‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.  
What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:5-6)*

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).*

*“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).*

Then, get in the habit of immediately going before the Lord with your “concern” before it becomes a worry. Keep short accounts with God. If you are about to engage in an activity that typically arouses worry, talk to the Lord about before you do it. Ask Him to preside over your thoughts and emotions. Commit that activity to Him, and ask Him to give you wisdom.

BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING  
PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

MAIN IDEA: SINCE OUR GOD CAN ALWAYS BE TRUSTED, THERE IS NEVER ANY REASON TO WORRY

AN ATTITUDE OF TRUST (6-7)

THE PROHIBITION AGAINST WORRY

WORRY IS NEVER APPROPRIATE

WORRY IS THE EXCLUSION OF GOD

THE ADMONITION TO PRAY

PRAY ABOUT *EVERYTHING*

PRAY WITH THANKSGIVING

THE PROMISE OF PEACE

PEACE IS THE RESULT OF TRUST

PEACE THAT TRANSCENDS UNDERSTANDING

PEACE THAT GUARDS OUR HEARTS AND MINDS