

Philippians 4:4-9

Peace: The Antidote to Anxiety

The Summit Church, Standalone

MPT: Rejoicing, praying, and meditating on the right things (Jesus!) is the believer's path to peace during disunity, anxiety, and worry.

MPS: God desires for us to live a life free of anxiety and full of peace. The peace of God will guard our heart (feelings) and mind (thinking) when we focus on right praying, right thinking, and right doing.

[MLK Video: Mahalia Jackson]

MLK...

- 25 by 25
- Sermon series coming later

TEXT

Open your Bible to Philippians 4...

My name is Curtis...welcome back or welcome for the first time...

STAND

(Avi to read)

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, 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. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

PRAY // Be Seated

INTRODUCTION

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, the most common mental illness in the United States is **ANXIETY**¹:

- 20% of ppl 18 and up (the other 80% are just lying)
- 1/3 of students between 13-18 years old
- Those who are 60 years and older (like PJD) are the least affected group. (They've either realized that most of what we worry about is ridiculous or they've grown too jaded to care anymore.)

If I said, "Raise your hand if you're anxious" does that make you anxious?

- Humor me: close your eyes... scale of 1-10 how stressed/anxious are you? Imagine the thing causing you stress. (Keyword=imagine. Otherwise you'll start pointing at people.)

We've all been anxious, right? Get all worked up over something you can't stop thinking about to the point where you're:

- On edge
- Irritable
- Can't sleep
- Fatigued
- Difficulty concentrating
- Body is tense

And what's society's solution?

- Think positive thoughts
- Focus on your breathing (STORY Conference)
- Avoid hard things at all cost
- Go on a vacation

¹ <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/facts-statistics>

- Buy this to be happy
- Drink this or take this pill

Obviously none of those things are working because our society is becoming increasingly more anxious year over year. We're anxious just talking about our anxiety.

Your anxiety might stem from:

- **Job or finances:** You hoped the promotion and the accompanying paycheck would rid you of your stress but all it's done is elevate your anxiety.
- **A relationship (or lack thereof)**
- **Kids**
- **Life purpose**
- **Spiritual**
- **Past trauma**
- Me trying to write this message on Wednesday and traffic + computer—LITERALLY GETTING ANXIOUS WHILE WRITING A MESSAGE ON OVERCOMING ANXIETY

Now a quick caveat here: I'm not talking about **healthy** anxiety. There's a sense in which anxiety could be a **God-given emotional response for our benefit.**

- For instance, if a lion were to walk on to this stage right now, I would have a healthy anxiety about it.
- Or anxiety for you might even be a **disordered physiological response, the sort of thing with a clinical diagnosis.** That's not sinful.
- It's important to know that the Bible is not forbidding healthy concern, but unhealthy anxiety.²

Fear—which can be a good thing—is a response to an **actual threat**. Whereas **anxiety**—the kind we're talking about today—is an emotional response to a **perceived threat**...you have *perceived* that something could happen and now you can't stop thinking about it. Specifically the kind of anxiety where you decide to **anticipate the future in the worst possible scenario and then *freak out* about it** (which is what you do, right? *Kid doesn't have shoes on yet so now they'll be late for school which means they won't get their full education which means they're gonna grow up with no intellectual or life skills and to be a non-contributing zero to society and...LET'S CALM DOWN, SHE'S 4 AND SHE JUST DOESN'T HAVE HER SHOES ON YET.*)

² Paul is genuinely concerned with Timothy in Phil 2:19-20.

I'm talking about a gnawing, corrosive worry where you **dwell** on things...you **stew** on them...you **can't think about anything else**. To the point it feels like your **heart is being torn in two** and your **mind just can't stop looping** that perceived problem on replay.

- In fact, that's the very idea of this word "anxious." The Greek word for 'anxious' has the idea of **being pulled in different directions**. Our **hopes** pull us in one direction and our **fears** pull us in another, and it feels like we're being pulled apart.
- In English the word "worry" comes to us from the Old English verb meaning "to strangle."
 - You've felt this, right? Your worry is suffocating to the point you feel like the hope and light and joy in your life is being strangled from your soul.

We operate out of anxiety, yet tell me the last time your anxiety made you feel better about your worries?

- **Charles Spurgeon: Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength.**

I share all this and I tell you those stats because I want you to see **it's not just you...but I also want you to know it doesn't have to be you**. Jesus said in **John 14:27**, **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."**

- Jesus says, *"Peace is possible!...so don't let your **heart** be troubled."*
- Jesus wants his people—he wants *you*—right here, right now, not just to **overcome anxiety**, he desires for you to **experience peace**.

Here in Phil 4 we have one of, if not *the*, most practical teaching on overcoming anxiety and experiencing peace in all of Scripture. Let's look at it...

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything...

Now this sounds great, doesn't it? Perhaps this is why you're even here today—you **don't want to be anxious; you want joy**. And so you open the Bible to Philippians 4 expecting to find the recipe for rejoicing and here's what it says: **Rejoice always; don't be anxious; don't worry!** Not sure about you, but at first glance this doesn't seem very helpful to me. *"Hey Jesus, I'm anxious. What should I do?" Great question! Be happy and don't be anxious.*

- (If you're married, lemme ask you wives right now—and husbands listen up cuz I'm about to help you out with something—*Wives, when you're stressed out and worrying about something, how helpful is it when your husband tells you to CALM DOWN?*)
- **Mad TV counseling skit with Bob Newhart: "Stop it..." "Listen to these words carefully and incorporate them into your life: STOP IT."**

Verses 4-6 are imperatives. We're given commands to **rejoice and to not be anxious**. Surely the Bible's not just telling us to get over it, sing some Bob Marley's *Everything's Gonna Be Alright*, and you'll be fine. So let's look closer: it's not just "rejoice," it's **⁴Rejoice in the Lord.**

- This is the foundation of overcoming anxiety and finding peace: we, as followers of Jesus are to rejoice in the very thing that can never be taken away from us.
- This is fundamentally different than “the power of positive thinking,” or trying to use your mind to “manifest your destiny.” That’s really popular today, but it’s worlds away from Paul’s point.

And note Paul is *not* saying you can’t be sad. The opposite of joy is not sadness because the Bible says we can be joyful when we’re sad; the opposite of joy is hopelessness. As we keep reading we’re gonna see how **joy** and **peace** are interwoven. The opposite of joy is not sorrow/sadness; it’s hopelessness. The Christian knows joy **in the middle of** sorrow...so joy can’t mean the absence of pain or hurt in life. Joy is produced in us in the awareness of God’s sovereignty and his goodness in our lives, which is why we’re to **rejoice in the Lord.**

See, I think many Christian today are losing their joy and losing their peace because we don’t expect attacks to our peace and our comfort and the perfect little lives we have drawn up and that we perceive in our heads.

- Let’s not forget where Paul is writing this from—he’s in prison. He’s under house arrest 24/7 with a guard standing watch over him. He knows he’s likely headed for his death at some point soon. Yet he’s still telling us there’s **reason to rejoice in the Lord and not be anxious.** . . . Paul has discovered the secret of overcoming anxiety that we’re looking for. So even in his darkest moments—even in the circumstances where our world would tell him he has every right to worry and be anxious and stressed—he can rejoice.
 - “Let your reasonableness / gentleness”. . . the way you handle stress is an active witness to the world around you that your life is anchored in a great peace and hope than your circumstances.

Thomas Merton (arguably the most influential American Catholic author of the twentieth century) said, **“You find peace not by rearranging the circumstances of your life, but by realizing who you are at the deepest level.”**

- One of the gifts of anxiety is that it **alerts us to what is truly anchoring our soul.** Worry and anxiety are **God's stress tests** to determine what we’re really building our hope on.
 - *Am I building my hope on Jesus? Am I anchored in the sovereignty and love of God? Or am I swayed and tossed and torn apart by the circumstances and happenings of my life?*

If the ‘what’ is to **rejoice, don’t be anxious,** and **have peace** then the obvious question is ‘how.’ If we are to conquer anxiety and experience the peace of God, there are three things God calls us to do in this passage: he calls us to right praying (v6), right thinking (v8), and right living (v9).³

The Antidote to Anxiety

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Vol. 2, p. 94). Victor Books.

1. Turn every care into a prayer (v6)

⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything **by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**

I grew up in a town in North Georgia and I remember when the first ABC store was being built (pre-Jesus days). I remember a handful of church folks who were staunchly opposed to it.

- **Which reminded me of a story I heard of another small town who had their first bar opening...** Local church strongly opposed, so they prayed God would intervene. Few days before grand opening, lightning struck the place and burned it down.
- Church folks were happy until they received notice the bar owner was suing them, contending their prayers were responsible for burning down the building. Obviously they strongly denied the charge against them.
- At the preliminary hearing the judge remarked, *“At this point I don’t know what I’ll decide, but it seems the bar owner believes in the power of prayer and these church people don’t!”*

Prayer seems so obvious and so elementary, yet often we don’t even begin to take seriously the power found in it. Paul says, “You wanna be anxious about nothing? Then be prayerful about everything.” To reiterate this point he uses three different words here:

1. Prayer

- Making your request known to the Lord through adoration, devotion, and worship.

2. Supplication

- Earnest sharing of our needs and problems
- Supplication is not a matter of physical energy but of spiritual intensity. It’s praying as if God really does care about your worries and is going to provide peace in the midst of them.

3. Thanksgiving

- Our “ask” column is huge. Do we have an “answered” column?
- We’re often eager to ask but slow to appreciate.
- There’s something about taking time to remember God’s past faithfulness that can give you assurance and peace about his future provision.
- But listen: **the only way we can pray with thanksgiving is when we’re prepared to be thankful no matter what God’s answer is.**

The kind of prayers we pray usually have ourselves at the center—our **needs**, our **hopes**, our **wants**, our **relief**, our **comfort**. You know we often pray? *“Hey, God. Help me. Thanks. Bye. I’ll hit you up next time I need something.”* But how did Jesus teach us to pray?

Matt 6 Lord’s Prayer is a game changer. “Our father...*hallowed* be your name...” (hallowed, not HOWARD)

Now the first thing Jesus tells us to ask God to do, is to **ask God that he would cause his name to be hallowed**...for his name to “be made **holy** and **set apart**.”

Let that sink in. The **first** thing...the **head** of the list...the one **above** all others...the most **central**, most **supreme**, most **all-encompassing**, **all-influencing**, **all-controlling** concern in our prayer should be to ask God to make his name #1 in our hearts.

- Praying for God’s glory above all else means you are forced to stop and think about what **God’s purposes may be in whatever is causing you stress and anxiety**...not just how it **personally affects you**.

Then Jesus goes on to tell us to pray “Give us *this day* our *daily* bread...”

- DAILY bread. He gives you enough bread today to sustain you for today’s challenges. Not bread for tomorrow’s challenges.
- God guarantees mercy today for today’s challenges; he doesn’t give mercy today for tomorrow’s challenges.

This is why prayer is such a strong antidote to anxiety. If we juxtapose them, look what happens:Anxiety vs prayer⁴

ANXIETY	PRAYER
rooted in self	rooted in God
narrow view of life—you can only see the problems or the perplexities around it	expansive view of life—God is so big that even our worst problems and worries shrink in view of his greatness
horizontal in focus—sees only the problem and your lack of resources to deal with it	vertical in focus—raises your eyes above and beyond to God and his power and resources
your problems control you	you’re reminded God is sovereign and controls your problems
expression of perceived fear	expression of faith

Turn every care into a prayer...and when you do that, look at v7: **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

⁴From Sam Storms

“And” is a super important conjunction here, because it connects the **previous truth** with the **present result**. **The promise of peace in v7 is preceded by the practice of prayer in v6.**

- It’s a whole lot easier to retreat into a corner and complain when you’re anxious than it is to pray. But if you’re not experiencing peace my first question would be have you been regularly participating in and practicing prayer.
- Turn every care into a prayer.

Notice the promise of prayer is not deliverance, it’s the peace of God.

- If, when you pray, you’re only ready to receive the answer you want, need, or believe you deserve then you’ll never find peace.
- The promise is peace, not the provision or change in circumstances you think you need or deserve.

One of the clearest examples of this in Scripture is the **story of Daniel**.

- Daniel is worshiping God in a culture where the King demanded everyone to worship him.
- When the King announces everyone must pray and bow down to him, Daniel goes to his room, opens his window toward Jerusalem and **Daniel 6:10-11**, **“¹⁰He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.¹¹Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God.”**
 - See that? Instead of being anxious about the possibility of being arrested and executed, Daniel turns his cares into prayers and prays with supplication and thanksgiving to God and what was the result? **Perfect peace in the midst of difficulty**. Daniel ends up spending the night sleeping peacefully in a lions den on concrete while the King couldn’t sleep up in his palace on his TempurPedic.

When I was a kid, if I needed to wake up at a certain time then I just told my parents about it and they’d take care of it. *“Dad, you gonna wake me up by 6a? Great.”* Then I went to sleep. I knew my Dad had it under control.

My **Dad would come into my room, rip the covers off, and slap my feet until I got up**. My point is that once I gave it to my Father, I didn’t worry about it. I didn’t stay up all night wondering if I’m gonna wake up on time. I didn’t stew on my anxiety pontificating on all the potential problems of my potential dereliction of punctuality.

- No, I handed it to my Dad and I trusted he would take care of me.

If EVERY care of mine can be turned into a prayer, that literally means EVERY care. There isn't anything too big for God to handle. There isn't anything too small for God to care about. It's like my attitude toward my kids—if they're worried about something, I CARE about it! I'm not weighing how big or small it is; my compassion for them leaps into action because of our relationship, not the specific problem.

21DOPF

- starts next Monday...

- 3 big questions PJD is gonna ask:
 - When are you going to pray each day during the 21 Days?
 - What are you going to fast from throughout the 21 Days?
 - Who is someone you can share your fasting & prayer plans with to help encourage you through the 21 Days?

2. Turn your thoughts into a thermostat; don't let them be a thermometer (v8)

You understand the difference here—a **thermostat regulates** the temperature while a **thermometer only reflects** the temperature.

- A **thermometer** simply moves up or down depending on the temperature around it—depending on the circumstances it's set in.
- A **thermostat influences** and **controls** the temperature around it.

The question is obvious: does your anxiety or peace fluctuate based on your present circumstances (thermometer)? Or do you have **peace which surpasses all understanding** even *in* hard circumstances (thermostat)?

To overcome anxiety we first pray (v6), then...

⁸Finally, 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.**

The battle for your mind is how you are transformed from a **worrier** into a **worshiper**. I've always loved this quote by Pastor Craig Groeschel: "Our lives are always moving in the direction of our strongest thoughts. What we think shapes who we are."

That's a bold statement, so let me show you how this theme is repeated all throughout Scripture:

- **Romans 12** says we are **transformed by the renewing of our minds.**
- **Isaiah** says "you keep him in **perfect peace** whose **mind** is stayed on you."
- **Colossians 3:2**, "Set your **minds** on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."
- **2 Cor 10:5**, "take every **thought** captive to obey Christ"
- **Eph 4:23**, "be renewed in the spirit of your **minds**"
- Look at **Romans 8:5–6**, "For those who live according to the flesh set their **minds** on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their **minds** on the things of the Spirit. To set the **mind** on the flesh is death, but to set the **mind** on the Spirit is life and peace."

You see that? How do you get life and peace?...you set your mind on the things of the Spirit. What we think shapes who we are—worriers or worshipers; anxiety-fueled or peace-filled.

- True peace involves the **mind** *and* the **heart**...you can't separate the two. Which is why **wrong thinking ultimately leads to wrong feeling**.
- When we remember what's right and good and true and honorable and just and pure and lovely and commendable and excellent and worthy of praise, then commit ourselves to focusing on those things, in turn our **feelings** will be molded by what we **think** and **focus** on. Our **feelings** and **emotions** (hearts) are not isolated from our **thinking** (minds), but rather are guided by it.

An incredible example of this is found in **Habakkuk chapter 3**. God has just spoken to him and then Habakkuk says

¹⁶ I hear, and my body trembles;
my lips quiver at the sound;
rottenness enters into my bones;
my legs tremble beneath me.

Talk about anxiety. Talk about stress. Not feeling too good are you, Habakkuk? Thanks for letting us know how you feel. So does he crawl into a corner and complain. Is he crippled by his emotions? *Tell us, Habakkuk, what are you gonna do?* Listen to this:

¹⁷ Though the fig tree should not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
¹⁹ GOD, the Lord, is my strength;

Everything in his body is being overcome with anxiety—he's trembling, quivering, heart is pounding...stress is overtaking him. If he stops right there, this chapter is over at v16. That's the **current temperature of his situation**.

- Instead he chooses to make his mind a **thermostat**...he chooses to bring his emotional experience and make it subservient to what he knows about God.
- You see it in v18...notice the verb he uses: ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹GOD, the Lord, is my strength.
- IOW, as one of my favorite Pastors, Alistair Begg, says, Habakkuk's decision to worship is volitional, not emotional.
 - Your circumstances change; but God never changes.

So if my anxiety thermometer is registering 101.8* and I need to “cool off,” how do I do that? Great question...Change the temperature by using **ABC:**

1. Ask yourself, “Is this thought from God?”

- a. It’s really hard to trust in a God whom you don’t know. It’s hard to believe God is gonna take care of everything if you don’t know anything about his character, or how he’s worked throughout history, or about the depths of his love.
- b. Do you know more of what Taylor Swift says about relationships than the Word of God?
- c. Social media...
- d. *Is this thought from God?*

2. Bible...open it!

- a. EM Bounds said, “The word of God is the food by which prayer is nourished and made strong.”
- b. In the divine order of things, our thinking is supposed to be informed and shaped and governed by God’s revelation given to us in Scripture.

3. Commit to contemplate

- a. At the end of v8 where it says “think about these things” the Greek word is *logizomai*. This is where we get the English word “logarithm”...as in a “complex mathematical equation problem,” the kind of thing that requires **prolonged contemplation**. That’s the kind of thinking God is calling us to here: “prolonged, fixated, contemplative thinking” on the things of the Lord.

Phil 4:8 is a great place to start:

- **TRUE**— things that correspond to the teaching of God’s Word
- **HONORABLE**— things that have the dignity of moral excellence
- **JUST**— things that conform to God’s standards
- **PURE**— things that are free from the taint of sin
- **LOVELY**— virtues that make believers attractive and winsome like generosity, kindness, compassion and willingness to forgive
- **COMMENDABLE**—e things that give Christians a good reputation and a good name
- **EXCELLENT**
- **WORTHY OF PRAISE**

And what—or better question, *who*—is all of these things? JESUS

Turn your thoughts into a thermostat, don’t let them be a thermometer. *In what specific ways do you need to replace untrue, dishonorable, unjust, impure, thoughts with thoughts about Jesus and his love and care for you?*

Because when you do that, let me show you what happens...⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

3. Practice makes perfect peace (v9)

You've probably all heard "practice makes perfect." My coach used to say **perfect practice makes perfect**.

- When it comes to overcoming anxiety through prayer and renewing your mind, God wants you to know that **practice makes perfect peace**.
- Again, isn't that what **Isaiah 26:3** says? "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you."

By its very definition, to "practice these things" means we don't have it all figured out. If you've been a Christian for 50 years you still have to "practice these things"—you still have to pray, you still have to check your mind, you still have to choose to rejoice.

- This is something you'll be doing the rest of your life. I tell you that not to discourage you, but to prepare you.
- The second we **think we've arrived** is when we're open to the Enemy's attacks on our hearts and minds.
- But the call to 'practice' is the call to **live according to our theology**, not **be captive to our anxiety**.

One of the most practical ways I've ever of doing this: Groeschel "God box"

- Physically write down your worries / prayers and put them in a "God box"
- When you do, pray, "God, I am trusting you with this. I know you are in control. I know you are bigger than this. This is not a thought I want to think, so I am giving this to you."
- Once you pray and put the problem in the box, go on with your life. Don't get me wrong, Satan's gonna tempt you to go back over to the box and peek in and wonder how God is doing with it and maybe, just maybe, you'll even be tempted to pick that worry back up. But know that when you do that you're effectively saying, "God, I don't trust you with this. God, I think you need *my* help with this."
- Instead, leave it there. The resolve to leave it there—even if you have to renew this resolve several times a day!--is an **act of faith**.

CONCLUSION

(Vamp)

Practice these things: rejoice, pray, think and focus on God and his goodness and, look at how v9 ends, ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Peace isn't found in the **absence of problems**; peace is found in the **presence of God**.

Don't read Philippians 4 as, "If I do all of these things then I'll finally arrive at the destination called Peace."

- No, it's *as you do all these things*—as you rejoice in the Lord, as you pray and seek him, as you set your mind on the things of the Spirit—as you do those things the God of peace is with you. His peace carries you through the entire process.
- The peace of God is not a when I arrive peace...it's not a one day peace...it's not a when/then peace...it's not a once I get the fairytale ending peace...not a when I send the kids off peace, when I pay the student loans off, when I get married. . . the peace of God is a right here, right now, offered to you in the person of Jesus Christ, the peace of God is available to you right now because the God of peace has made himself available through the cross of Jesus Christ. All you have to do is humble yourself and surrender.

You will never possess peace until you possess Jesus, the Prince of Peace. How did Jesus become the Prince of Peace?

- **He took up our pain and bore our suffering. . . he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.**
- That's why in John 20 when Jesus says "Peace be with you" the very next thing he does is show the disciples the wounds in his hands and his side.⁵ It's a reminder of what Jesus went through to give us peace.

The peace of God is first and foremost peace *with* God. Peace isn't something you find; it's someone you possess. We don't make peace; God made peace and only in him can we truly experience it to the fullest.

- You cannot turn away from the source of peace and still find peace.
- If you aren't at peace *with* God you'll never experience the peace *of* God.
- But I've got good news for you: because of the blood of Jesus you can experience the peace that surpasses all understanding.

And this peace is something that nothing and nobody will ever be able to take away from you.

- Our bodies may fall sick and fail us...
- The economy could collapse and we may lose everything...
- You might lose your reputation to slander and gossip and abuse...
- but the **peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts (feelings) and your minds (thinking) in Christ Jesus.**

Do you know him? Do you have peace *with* God?

PRAY

⁵ John 20:20