

“Winning the War With Worry”

Philippians 4:4-9

Turn with me in your Bible to the fourth chapter of the letter to the Philippians. We’re quickly coming to the end of our study through this epistle. And just like he does in his other letters, Paul concludes with a very practical emphasis. He typically spends the first several chapters covering doctrine and then the practical application of that doctrine in the last few chapters. Take the book of Romans for example. He is doctrinal in the first 11 chapters, but then transitions to a practical application of it all in chapter 12. Or in Ephesians, he spends three chapters going over the great doctrinal emphasis of all that we’ve received in Christ. Then in the last three chapters, he shows how it ought to translate into submitted and obedient living. His style is no different here in Philippians. For much of the letter, Paul has outlined the joy which is ours by virtue of our position in Christ. He then shows us the practicalities of that position, the way that we are to live in light of who we are and what we’ve received in Christ. And he keeps coming back to this theme of joy and rejoicing in the Lord. This is to be our mindset as we live out our days as heavenly citizens making our way home.

Now, with that being said, there is one thing that is sure to undermine our joy more so than anything else if we let it, and that is worry. Fear and anxiety would rule our hearts and minds if it had its way.

Having just come through the holiday season, we’ve all just survived the most stressful time of year. The time of peace on earth and goodwill toward men, right? But you may not know that 64% of Americans say during this season their anxiety level goes up and not down. And there are reasons for that. Psychologists talk about something referred to as “seasonal affective disorder” or SAD. It is often brought on by shortened days, less sunlight, more darkness. It does something to sort of a generalized gloominess that we experience. Another factor is that during the holidays, we travel. Nearly 75% of Americans travel from Thanksgiving through New Year. Right in between there, a lot of people are on the go. Time in traffic, going to airports, missing flights, weather, all of it raises rather than lowers your stress level. We’ve gathered with family, which brings

another level of stress—some of which we don't look forward to getting together with perhaps. And then there is the all the mess to clean up after it is all said and done. The kids are back in school, it is back to routine. And while some look forward to what the New Year has in store, others perhaps will look forward with a sense of dread. Anxiety taps them on the shoulder.

Corrie Ten Boom — *“There is no panic in heaven! God has no problems, only plans.”*

With that in mind, we've come to what are perhaps some of the most beloved verses in the New Testament that relate to our thought life. Worry is a problem of the mind, and in this text Paul tells us how to win the war with worry. (Read)

Anxiety is a problem all human beings at some point have to deal with. It may more of an issue for some than others, but it affects us all. Now, of all the times in history, this may be the time when these verses are more appropriate than at any other time in this culture. It speaks to this culture in our country more than any other. You say, “Why is that?” We are told that anxiety disorders are the most common mental health problem in America. And they will say, they estimate that 40 million Americans suffer from some form of anxiety disorder. That is 18% of all adults. Some years ago, Boston University reported that anxiety has surpassed depression and all other disorders in our country. Among different countries around the world, the World Mental Health Survey stated Americans were among the most anxious people with more clinically significant levels of anxiety than people in a lot of third world countries. In 2018, The New York Times put out an article where they stated in America we have developed a characteristic spirit of relentless worrying and agitation. (That was before Covid-19!) Over the last three decades, anxiety disorders have skyrocketed more than 1,200%. Dr. Robert Leahy has said the average high school student today has the same level of anxiety as an average psychiatric patient in the early 1950s. That's our culture.

Well, what are we so worried about? In America, what are we all so anxious about? The APA (American Psychiatric Association) found out that the top things that concern us the most involve things such as the economy and personal income. A full 75% of adults wonder if they will have enough money to survive whatever happens in the future.

70% are worried about issues related to personal safety. Terrorist attacks and violence, people fear if they or someone they love will become the victim of some hostile act of violence. And 68% reported that the future is a significant source of stress. The trouble with worry is that it doesn't seem to be all that harmful. But like a snake in the grass, it will bite you and its venom will spread. Doctors warn us of all the physical side effects of chronic worry, not to mention the toll it takes on our relationships, or how it hurts our spiritual well being.

On one hand, I understand it. From the perspective of a believer versus an unbelieving world, I understand why its anxiety is so high. I understand why the world is panic stricken and anxious. If you don't live with an anchor for the soul, you're going to drift in a sea of anxiety. And for most people in the world, they don't have anything to anchor their soul. They have no real sense of purpose in life. If you think that you are existing in some meaningless universe with no rhyme, no reason, no design, no plan, no God—we are nothing more than the fortunate occurrence of accidental circumstance. We're here by chance. No wonder you feel isolated and lonely. Living in a universe with no Creator is a scary place to be. The best the world can do for you is to help you manage your anxiety. But God doesn't want you to simply manage your worry. He offers you the opportunity to eliminate it altogether!

Since worry and anxiety can be such a serious issue in our spiritual life, it shouldn't be surprising that Jesus dealt with anxiety at length in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, He spends more verses on the subject of anxiety than just about any other subject. Now, I'll come back to what Paul says here in just a minute. But turn with me for a second to Matthew 6. In only a few words, Jesus spoke more clearly and authoritatively on worry than I could in a lifetime. But look at what He says in:

Matthew 6:25-34—“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? 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? And which of you by

being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 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? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Notice how Jesus uses the word ‘anxious’ five times in this brief span of verses. The word used there is a Greek word ‘merimnao’ which means to be troubled with cares, or filled with anxious thoughts. This same word appears 19 times in 17 New Testament verses. It is translated into three English words primarily: worry, anxious, or care. So when Jesus said do not be anxious about your life, this is the word He chose. In Luke 10 when Jesus speaks to Martha, who was so distracted and busy while Mary was sitting at His feet, Jesus said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.” ‘Merimnao’ is the word Jesus uses. It is compound Greek word, two words put together, the first of which (‘merizo’) means to tear or separate, to tear or to divide. The second word (‘nous’) means mind. And so put those two together, and you have ‘merimnao’ which means literally to divide the mind.

It’s an appropriate description of anxiety. Anxiety is when your mind is divided between legitimate thoughts and destructive thoughts. It takes your mind in two different directions. James said a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. It is the same word which Paul now uses here in verse 6. It presents the picture of a divided mind, a mind that is torn between what is real and what is possible, the immediate and the potential. How can we win the war over worry? Three steps are found in what Paul is writing now in Philippians 4:

1—SEEK your joy in the Lord (4:4-5)

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.”

The word ‘worry’ comes from a German word that means to choke or strangle. And let me tell you, that’s what worry does to your joy. One person has said that, “Worry is an old man with bended head, and carrying a load of feathers which he thinks are lead.” And worrying about things is foolish because it concerns that which isn’t—it lives in a completely hypothetical future. It deals in the realm of what if’s, or what might be’s, and the maybe’s of life. It is made up of useless speculation and unfounded fears.

David Jeremiah—*“The worrier attempts to live in the future, and that presents him with two problems: the future isn’t here, and the future isn’t his. Nothing can be done, and no amount of worrying affects the issue one iota. The future is unknown, uncontrollable, and therefore irrelevant in terms of our peace of mind.”*

And as long as our minds dwell on the worst case scenario, we might as well kiss our joy goodbye and guarantee our own misery. One writer has said, “Stubborn anxieties work like petty thieves in the dark corners of our thoughts as they pickpocket our peace and kidnap our joy.” The first key to winning the war with worry involves seeking your joy and satisfaction in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not in your circumstances. Of all the joy thieves that plague our lives, none is more subtle or more prevalent than worry.

Now, keep in mind what Paul has just mentioned about the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche in the first three verses. In spite of the friction which existed between these two and the sides they represent, Paul is urging the church to rejoice in the Lord. This is the third time he has used the phrase ‘in the Lord’ in as many verses. We’re to stand firm in the Lord, we’re to agree in the Lord, and we’re to rejoice in the Lord. That’s the key. It is in the Lord that we find joy and harmony in our relationship to others.

A.W. Tozer—*“Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one*

hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship."

This verse expresses the central theme of Philippians, this call for believers to rejoice no matter the circumstances. It is so important to Christian living that Paul repeats this for the sake of emphasis—"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice." We can rejoice in a lot of different things, can't we? We rejoice in those things that bring us the most pleasure and satisfaction. If you want to know what you truly worship in life, trace your rejoicing back to its ultimate source. Can you say that the Lord is the source of all your rejoicing, and that He is the One in whom you seek to find joy? Or is it something else?

"Rejoice"—*present imperative verb; it is a command that requires continual, habitual rejoicing*

It is a conscious decision requiring a moment by moment effort, not dependent upon emotion or circumstance. It is an action before it is an emotion. And what this tells me is that joy is a choice more than a feeling. Its a decision more than a sensation.

Joy is an **outlook** based on an **uplook**!

Notice Paul tells us how often and when to rejoice. Does he say rejoice in the Lord, sometimes? Or, rejoice in the Lord when you feel like it? Rejoice in the Lord most of the time. No, he says rejoice in the Lord always. Paul is a man who practices what he preaches. Remember that he is in prison as he writes these words. There were plenty of hardships for which he could have worried himself sick. So he could testify of this in his own personal life. He said:

2 Corinthians 6:10—"...being sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

Doesn't that sound strange? You can have both. You can be filled with sorrow and grief, faced with uncertainties, and at the same time your soul rejoices. You experience one but make the choice for the other. Paul and Silas were put in jail in Philippi in Acts

16. They were beaten and put in chains. But at midnight Paul and Silas sang hymns. At the darkest time of night, there in the darkest place they have ever been. Yet they sing hymns of worship to God at night. That's what it means to rejoice in the Lord always.

Paul understood that joy is a personal choice to respond to life's uncertainties with faith. That's a good definition for joy—a personal choice to respond to life's uncertainties with faith. Not fear or worry, which will result in the opposite. And so he says, "Rejoice in the Lord." He doesn't simply say 'rejoice.' He qualifies it—rejoice in the Lord. Life is tough, but God is good. Life may have its concerns, but God is good, and so rejoice in the Lord, always. Let me say it again! Listen to what the writer of Proverbs has to say about it:

Proverbs 15:15—“He who is of a merry heart has a continual feast.”

No matter the situation, when you rejoice in the Lord and choose faith not fear, you have before you a continual feast. Circumstances aren't the determining factor. The Lord and His sovereign, providential guidance is what I rejoice in.

Look at verse 5, "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand." Rejoicing in the Lord results in a reasonable or gentle spirit that is attractive to others. J.B. Phillips translates verses 4-5 this way, "Delight yourselves in God, yes, find your joy in Him at all times. Have a reputation for gentleness, and never forget the nearness of your Lord." Instead of being contentious, the Christian is to be gentle. Instead of a worrisome spirit, we're to have a winsome spirit. We don't fear the worst case scenarios of life because we know the Lord is at hand which is to say He is near and close.

Beyond this referring to His second coming, it is an affirmation that the Lord is near to His people to communicate His joy and peace to their troubled hearts. Paul is saying we understand that we live in His presence. The promise that He is close to His people in a time of concern and uncertainty. When it feels like the world is falling apart. You can walk through the valley of the shadow of death and not fear any evil, for you know the Lord is with you. And that's why anxiety shouldn't control my mind and heart. The Lord is close by me! He is near. The disciples were to live in this assurance:

Matthew 28:20—“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Psalms 34:18—“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”

When you come across people like that, you're drawn to them. They are a great advertisement for the church. But worry will rob you of joy and make you a grumpy Christian. And so don't let anything do that in your life. You can find joy in the Lord always, and an understanding that He is at hand will keep you calm and focused.

2—SURRENDER your anxieties through prayer (4:6-7)

“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 minds in Christ Jesus.”

Winning the war over worry demands that you and I find our ultimate joy and satisfaction in Jesus. But a second and very necessary step involves surrendering our fears and anxieties to God through prayer. God has a solution for our worry. In other words, we don't have to live in the grip of it any longer. The remedy to being dominated by fear is found in these verses, which we could boil down to six words—Worry about nothing, pray about everything! I need to cement those words in my mind, say them over and over again, write them on a 3 x 5 card and tape it to my mirror, or make it the lock screen on my phone. These words form the foundation of God's prescription for worry warts like me. That's not say our concerns aren't valid, for many times they are. But we must not make them a worry. You will notice that in these verses, Paul provides both an instruction and an assurance. Notice first:

The instruction

Verse 6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything.” There are no caveats, no exceptions. Whether the issue is big or small by comparison is irrelevant. Don't be anxious, don't worry about anything. Don't let fear dominate your mind to the point that it robs you of joy and peace. Now, that is easier said than done. Paul doesn't stop

there, so notice he continues by saying, “but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Don’t worry about anything, pray about everything. The way that we surrender worry is through prayer. Someone says, “Well, that’s nice Paul. But it is much too simplistic and naive. Surely there must be more to it than that!”

While it may be simple, it is not simplistic. Most truth, you will discover, is simple truth. It may not be easy, but it is simple, and it is necessary. It’s needful because some of us are stuck in verse 6. We live in the world of worry and anxiety, anxious thoughts, stress. We never seem to get away from it. And so it is simple truth. It is necessary truth. But I also believe it is transformational truth. If you can get out of the first part of verse 6, and into the second part of verse 6, then it will lead you into verse 7. It will completely revolutionize your life. It could give you a whole new lease on life. In addition to instruction, Paul also gives:

The assurance

Verse 7 says, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” When you surrender your anxieties through prayer, God promises to fortify your heart and mind with His peace. And this isn’t something which comes from us, but comes from the character of God. He shares with us His character, and in His character there is not one hint of anxiousness. His peace becomes our peace. Notice Paul says it surpasses all of our understanding, or our human comprehension. In other words, there is a supernatural quality to this peace that cannot be explained by ordinary intervention. Even though the circumstances leading to our frustration may not change, something changes on the inside of us. Such peace is God’s gift to you and me. It is the fruit of His Spirit, not something we can muster up or generate, especially in distressing circumstances or in a time of confusion and loss. His peace guards my mind.

Stephen Davey — *“Consequently, our real challenge is not eliminating our unpleasant circumstances or even understanding them all; it is learning to trust our infinite, wise, all-powerful and gracious God.”*

Perhaps you're familiar with these lyrics:

*"Learning to lean, learning to lean,
I'm learning to lean on Jesus.
Finding more power than I've ever seen,
I'm learning to lean on Jesus!"*

*"What a fellowship, what a joy divine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms!"*

For the rest of my life in this world, that will become more and more true for me.
Through the various pressures that will inevitably come, may I learn to lean on Jesus.

3—SATURATE your mind with the truth (4:8-9)

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

If we are to win the war with worry, we will have to seek our joy in the Lord and surrender our anxieties through prayer. One final thing that I will mention involves saturating your mind with the truth. Worry is a matter of mindset. Your mindset is an important thing which often determines the things you do. We live in a world where emotion tends to drive a person's behavior. Our emotions must be kept in check, and our daily decisions must be determined by an objective standard rather than a subjective feeling which is always in flux. There will be plenty of times in your life as a Christian that you don't 'feel' like obeying. You don't 'feel' like worshiping. You don't 'feel' like loving your neighbor. A child of God walks by faith, not by feeling. Which means that we need to possess a mind that is made up. And your mindset is one of the most important things about you as a person. So notice now in verse 8 that Paul gets

specific about what we allow to occupy our minds and dominate our thought life and thinking patterns. He says:

We must careful in what we ponder

Notice that last phrase in verse 8 says, “Think about these things.” God’s Word has a lot to say about what we think about.

Proverbs 23:7—“As one thinks within himself, so he is.”

Whatever is on our mind and heart will eventually show up in our hands and feet. Thinking precedes behaving. And so if worry dominates my mind, the byproduct of that in my life will be faithless living. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord God with all of your heart, your soul, and your mind. Since having a renewed mind is so essential to the growth and spiritual health of the believer, notice how verse 8 provides us some criteria for what we allow to occupy our minds. What should you and I allow to influence our thinking as the followers of Jesus? Paul gives us what you might call a mental checklist for right thinking.

Is it true? The word refers to that which is reliable and faithful, the opposite of that which is false or a lie. In other words, our minds must be fixed upon what is real, genuine, and authentic. That which is defined by God’s Word. The Bible is true and trustworthy. A mind set on the truth will lead to a life of integrity. At the same time, dwelling upon that which is false will produce false living.

Is it honorable? The word means that which is noble, or elevated. Think about that which pulls you up, and not what takes you down. Think about those things that pull you up and above the muck and mire of this world.

Is it just? This refers to that which is upright and holy, or in keeping with the character of God. To think justly means my thoughts are in conformity with God’s Word.

Is it pure? This word comes from the root word for holy or holiness or sanctification. It refers to that which is ethically clean and unmixed with moral impurities. Our minds

must be filled with that which is morally clean and pure. Think on those things which are virtuous and unstained.

Is it lovely? It speaks of that which is attractive and pleasing to God as opposed to the ugliness of sin. The things which are 'lovely' are beautiful in the sight of God. It is in keeping with the character and mind of Christ.

Is it commendable? It means that which is well spoken of or highly regarded by the Lord. That which is commended in His sight.

And so to sum it up, Paul says, "If there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." If it is not true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, or commendable, it should not occupy my mind. Don't give it any head space. Be careful what you ponder. And then:

Be committed in what we practice

Look at verse 9, "What you have learned and received and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." Right thinking leads to right living. And pondering the truth must result in practicing what is true. If we dwell on that which is excellent, it will keep us from so much of the worry that debilitates us. If this is the practice of your life, Paul says "the God of peace will be with you." Possessing the peace of God is only found in knowing the God of peace. What are the specific needs in your life? What has been weighing you down lately? What burden have you been carrying around? Something that's no doubt filling your mind with anxious thoughts. Something that's gnawing at you deep on the inside.

1 Peter 5:7—"Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you."

Instead of essentials, we worry about nonessentials. And rather than thanking God for His provision today, we worry about His provision tomorrow. Whenever we focus on the wrong things, we miss out on what is most important.

Chuck Swindoll—*"After more than 40 years of marriage, a woman's husband suddenly died. For several months she sat alone and in her house with the shades pulled and*

the door locked. Finally, she decided she needed to do something about her situation. The loneliness was too much. She went down to the local pet store to look over the selection. She looked at dogs, cats, goldfish. Nothing seemed quite right. She told the store clerk that we wanted a pet that could communicate. Suddenly he thought of one of his prized parrots. He showed her the colorful bird. She said, "Does it talk?" He said, "Absolutely. This bird has an extensive vocabulary." And so the woman bought the bird. At last she had a companion she could talk to, who could answer her back. But there was a problem. A full week went by without the bird saying a single word. Beginning to worry, she went back to the store and told the clerk. She said, "I've not been able to get a sound out of that bird. I'm so worried!" So he said, "Well, did you buy a mirror when you were here last week?" She said, "No." He said, "Well, that's your problem. That parrot needs a mirror to help him feel comfortable. In no time, he will begin to talk." So she bought the mirror and put it in the cage. But still, nothing. And so another week passed, and not a peep came out of that bird. She went back down to the pet store. Had the same conversation with the clerk. He said, "Well, did you happen to buy a ladder when you got the cage?" She said, "A ladder? No, I didn't know it needed a ladder. Will that make it talk?" The clerk said, "Works like a charm. That parrot will climb up and down that little ladder, get some exercise, and before long he will talk nonstop." So she bought the ladder, put it in the cage, and waited...and then she waited some more. Another week, still nothing. She bought a swing...still nothing. Finally, after weeks of that bird not talking, she steamed into the pet store. The clerk met her at the counter, "Hey, how's the parrot?" She said, "It died! After all that money spent on cages and mirrors and ladders and swings!" The clerk said, "I can't believe that! Did it ever say anything at all?" The woman said, "Well, as a matter of fact it did. As it lay there taking its last few breaths, it said, 'Hey lady, don't they have any food down at that store?'"

There is no greater waste of time than worry, my friend. Nothing will rob you of joy like worry will. It will keep your mind occupied with the wrong things. To win the war over worry, you must seek your joy in the Lord, surrender your anxieties through prayer, and saturate your mind with the truth. And before you know it, your worries will evaporate

like the morning fog, and the peace of God will flood your soul. And it will surpass all human comprehension!