

Series: Side by Side
Message Title: **Prayer Conquers Anxiety**
Date: Sunday, May 27, 2018
Scripture: Philippians 4:4-7
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Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

Strange how often the emotions of excitement and anxiety are seated near each other in the arena of life.

Excitement is something that gives us a surge of energy and adds to the goodness of life and yet, anxiety is something that sucks the energy of life out of us, exchanging stress for strength in the best of our days.

I'm probably speaking to people in both categories today. Some of you are here and you are excited—especially parents and students since graduation has come. You are very excited to be here now, and eager to look ahead. But it won't be long till you are like others sitting around you today because...

Some of you are here and you are stressed. Life's next chapter is unclear, and the conflicts

and circumstances of today along with the uncertainties of tomorrow create a haunting presence of fear.

What do you do when you are anxious or afraid? Some people drink; others are driven faster, harder, more; some are defiant—they rage with anger; and then, some get depressed.

The Apostle Paul addresses the issue of stress in this little book of Philippians, and he does it in the context of prayer. We are better together through prayer.

Paul speaks to the entire community of believers in Philippi and offers this simple, specific and straightforward instruction:

“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” (Philippians 4:6-7 ESV).

Note several important emphases in this passage:

“Do not be anxious about anything.” What does this include? Difficulty, disease, deficits, division, even death. Why? Because anxiety is detrimental to your spiritual, mental, emotional and physical life.

“Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad” (Proverbs 12:25 ESV).

“There is nothing that can so consume the strength and joy you need in life today as the subtle enemy called anxiety.”



1. What Causes Anxiety?

The word translated, *anxiety*, means to be concerned about many things and to be drawn in different directions—a mental and emotional tug of war; a frowning uncertainty; a fearful churning; and the feeling of being weighed down with care.

Anxiety is broad in scope and burdensome in experience. Anxiety touches and applies to so many areas of life.

So what causes anxiety? Consuming concern and a lack of control. John Piper described it this way: "Anxiety seems to be an intense desire for something, accompanied by a fear of the consequences of not receiving it."

We don't know all of what provoked anxiety at Philippi, but there are several story lines that offer clues:

- They were being persecuted and were facing resistance to their faith.
- They were struggling with internal attitudes of dissension and strife.
- They were concerned about the well being of Paul and Epaphroditus.
- They were facing poverty, deprivation and insecurity.
- They were battling assaults on joy.

How about you? What makes you anxious? Could it be one or more these eternal causes?

- **Finances**—struggle with financial sufficiency and security.
- **Families**—marriage; parenting that provokes and produces anxiety

See Psalm 127:1-5. In a discussion about God's blessing is a warning about the debilitating impact of anxiety on the home and family.

- **Relationships**—Is a member of the family lost and running from God? Kids resisting authority? Mate neglecting responsibility?
- **Jobs**—Psalm 127 and was used by Jesus in Luke 10:41 to describe Martha—true not only of those who work, but the worries of performance, grades for kids, etc.
- **Future**—not knowing what tomorrow holds. Jesus addressed the issue of our consuming human tendency toward consuming anxiety:

“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" (Matthew 6:25-34 ESV).

According to our Lord, we are anxious about the length of our days, the condition of our bodies, the next meal (where-when-what), what we will wear, and MORE.

What is our biggest cause of anxiety? A struggle with humanity, and humility—I'm not in charge and I have to trust God.

Jesus affirms the Father's care and love for us. See Matthew 6:32.

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love" (1 John 4:18 ESV).

If God cares for flowers and birds, He's got a plan for you, too.

2. What are the Consequences of Anxiety?

Let me point out some of the outcomes of anxiety:

- We become self-consumed and self-focused. We become brat-like in our behaviors and think life is all about us and our problems, pains and petty preferences. Think about a child in a tantrum. Why? Anxious and wants attention!

We often don't really care about others with greater need, only just getting the attention we want and think we deserve.

- We forget the goodness and grace of God measured in our lives. Forgetfulness is a sin against God.

“Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His rules and His statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deuteronomy 8:11-14 ESV).

- We abuse our minds, bodies and relationships. Anxiety is expressed in rapid heart rate, exhaustion, nervousness, mouth ulcers and cold sores, weight gain, weight loss, insomnia, high-blood pressure, and hair loss (gave it away)! Anxiety makes us irritable, angry, and disagreeable.
- We experience loss of joy. “Anxiety is not a pain-killer, but a joy-stealer.”

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice... 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”
(Philippians 4:4, 6-7 ESV).

Note the opposite of anxiety—the peace of God—is presented and promised. M.R. Vincent in *New Testament Word Studies* says, “Peace is the fruit of believing prayer.”

3. What is the Cure for Anxiety?

In our world, medicine, massage, vacations, parties, etc., are often our cure for anxiety, but the Apostle Paul’s RX is quite different: “In EVERYTHING by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your request known to God.” PRAY!

“Prayer does not always change the situation and make it better, but prayer always changes us and makes us better.” —David Jeremiah

- Words are combined to guide us in praying and are combined here to provide direction in the face of anxiety. Paul comes from every angle!

Prayer = general word; includes all aspects of prayer, esp. praise and worship, reverence.

Get your eyes on the Lord! Get your eyes on the unchanging God, not the ever-changing circumstances of life.

This reference to prayer is not focused on the words or parts of prayer, but the spirit of desperation and dependence that drives us to pray.

Supplication. Here we take the specific burden, problem, fear or concern to God. Where do you need God's supply? Supplicate! This is the off-loading of the burden with God—item-by-item and piece-by-piece.

Thanksgiving. This is to be the companion to all prayer activity. Thanksgiving also implies submission. I consciously try to make this part of my prayer for the sick, in times of distress, and even in the face of death.

It is both submission to the wisdom of God and celebration of the grace and goodness of God.

“The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD”
(Job 1:21b ESV).

Each and all of these are woven together and are the way in which we bring or deliver our request to God. Note the personal reference, “your requests.” What favor are you asking? Bring it to God!

“Nothing is too great for God’s power and nothing is too small for God’s care.”
—Charles R. Erdman

Some of you may remember the old hymn,
What a Friend We Have in Jesus?

*What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!*

William Barclay suggests three things to remember in every place and point of prayer:

1. The love of God for you
2. The wisdom of God over you
3. The power of God in you

Is your focus on a productive activity or a consuming worry?

“The peace of God” will stand guard in your life. Paul uses the word that pictures a military guard standing watch, posted. God garrisons His people.

God confines us in His love and care. Paul had guards. They were there to keep him in, but he knew those same regiments were used at the palace to keep others out. I think Paul alluded to both when he said, “Heart and mind.” We need God’s peace to keep our heart in check and we need God peace to keep our minds from being invaded.

“Passes understanding” does not mean it is a realm of peace beyond human comprehension, but rather it is the affirmation to the heart of God’s love, care and action for our God and for His glory. This does not

mean you will never be alarmed. We are alarmed like a clock that calls us to awareness and response, but we take the prompting of that alarm to the Lord, and in the Lord, we find peace and refuge:

“Casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7 ESV).

What is guarded? “Hearts” and “Minds.” The heart includes the whole of your inner being while the mind has to do with your moment by moment processing of events and experiences in life. When we give God charge, then we change the guard from us and our army of anxiety to God and His messengers of peace.

Example: Guards at Buckingham Palace. The Royal Standard flag flies overhead only when the sovereign is in residence, and it is never flown at half-mast. It is the same in our hearts and minds when the King rules on the throne.

Let’s be clear. This peace is only available to those who are “in Christ Jesus.” Peace is a gift and it can only be known and experienced in a relationship with the Prince of Peace.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33 ESV).

The King and the kingdom—all the rest is just details.

In Paul’s view, he always emphasized the divine and human action. He repeatedly affirmed and proclaimed the sovereignty of God, but he never failed to challenge the human responsibility. Remember Philippians 2:13?

“For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13 ESV).

God has and is sovereignly working in you, but you must respond in surrender, humility and faith.