

**Question:** *How can we face the harsh realities of life and not be stressed by anxious worry? (Part 2 of 2)*

Last week's column described the challenges the apostle Paul faced as a servant of Jesus Christ. On his missionary journeys he was publicly stripped, beaten and thrown into jail. Later in his life, he experienced fourteen days of a life-threatening storm at sea, a shipwreck and a snake bite that should have killed him. Yet, he had a living faith that God was always present in his life and powerfully active. That faith was what enabled Paul to write from a prison cell in Rome, "Rejoice in the Lord always . . . In nothing be anxious" (Philippians 4:4 & 6).

At the time Paul wrote these things, he also knew that the Christians in Philippi were facing the serious stresses of persecution (Phil. 1:29-30). Speaking from his own experiences and faith in God, he gave them six admonitions to encourage and help them cope with any possible anxiety or worry they might face (Phil 4:4-9). I believe these same principles can help us handle worries in our lives today. Consider the following:

(1) "Rejoice in the Lord always." He did not say, "Be happy." Happiness is dependent on external circumstances in life, but joy in the Lord transcends all of life's experiences. After being beaten and cast into an inner jail cell in Philippi and with their feet in stocks, Paul and Silas could not have been happy. But, unbelievable as it may seem, they were heard praying and singing hymns to God at midnight (Acts 16:25). By focusing on the power and goodness of the Lord in joyful praise, Paul knew he could be lifted up no matter what happened to him.

(2) "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." In times of trouble, most people tend to react in anger. Christians with genuine faith in God are different. They know that the Lord is always near and that he will see that justice is done; therefore, they will not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

(3) "Do not be anxious about anything." The word translated "anxious" is very broad in meaning. On one extreme, it can refer to deep caring concern and on the other to fretful worry carried to the point of

distraction. A genuine concern for people is appropriate, but we must not worry about that which may or may not happen or that over which we have no control. We must trust the sovereign God to care for us.

(4) “In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Pray with strong pleading when needed as we present the list of our requests to God. We should be filled with thanksgiving even before knowing how God may answer our prayers. When we do, the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). God gives of his own peace to protect the source of anxiety: our emotions and our thinking.

(5) After listing several noble virtues, Paul said, “If anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things.” In times of fear and stress we may find it difficult to see anything good. At that time it become important to refocus our thinking and not dwell on the negative. Instead, we need to focus on the incredible good that is always present with the Lord.

(6) Finally, we should put into practice what has been learned from the Lord and his messengers. That means we cannot sit around; we need to get moving. As Paul said: “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

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