

Finding Peace From Anxiety Through Joyful Surrender

Philippians 4:2-7

Today we are going to continue our study of Paul's letter to the Philippians. The passage we will look at has incredible insight for us in how we ought to deal with our anxiety. If you are an anxious person, it's possible that you have this passage underlined, highlighted, and sticky noted in your Bible. If you've gone through Rooted, you were asked to memorize a portion of the verses we will read today.

Before we walk through that, I do want to briefly touch on a couple points that Paul makes in verses 2-3 of Chapter 4 regarding disagreements we may have with one another in the Body of Christ. So let's turn there now, learn what God has to say to us in these verses, and then spend the rest of our time this morning talking about anxiety. If you have your bibles turn with me to Philippians chapter 4, verses 2-3. We read:

² I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Paul is addressing two women who are in conflict with one another. Euodia and Syntyche. We aren't given any information about them, who they are, or what they were disagreeing over. However, because Paul chose to mention these women by name (in a public letter mind you), we can assume these women were vital to the unity of the church in Philippi and that their disagreement was serious enough to bring up. This was no petty argument. I'm picking the low hanging fruit here for our first point.

Disagreement Amongst Mature Believers is OK

Disagreement is not the enemy. Hatred is. Healthy churches are not healthy because there is no disagreement, but in *how* those in them disagree. It is imperative for the spread of the Gospel that we in the church look different from the rest of the world in how we handle disagreement. It is ok for us to have disagreements with one another. We don't need to be surprised by this.

Paul addresses someone referred to as His “true companion” to help these women. Some translations say “Yokefellow”, which some believe to be a proper name. For our purposes, it’s clearly unnecessary to name the person, since everyone at Philippi, including the one addressed, would have known who was intended. What can we learn from this?

We Occasionally Need Help From Others in our Disagreement

It is ok to ask for help! Of course, this shouldn’t happen every time we have a disagreement with someone. The goal is always to resolve an issue together. However, sometimes we need the help of others. And it’s important to note that whoever this “true companion” was, it is safe to say that he or she was a prominent and influential member of the congregation, perhaps a person of tact as well as influence. In other words, he or she was a trusted, mature follower of Christ. Just finding someone off the street isn’t going to cut it. We too, when seeking someone to help us resolve an issue, ought to find someone whom *both parties trust and respect*.

Now, I want to clarify one thing. Conflict resolution is difficult, and is not always guaranteed. Paul is not advocating a linear, streamlined process here. These sorts of situations can be messy and painful. I know of situations where two *mature* believers in Christ, even with the help of a trusted mediator, continue to struggle to resolve the issue together. This stuff is difficult and requires incredible amounts of grace and humility.

One thing we learn from Paul’s life is that he never saw his struggles as absent of God’s teaching. Throughout Paul’s letter to the Philippians, it is obvious that Paul saw His hardship and suffering and his conflict with others as his greatest teacher. God used difficult circumstances to mold and shape Paul to become more like Jesus. So the question for us is this:

Do you believe that God will use your disagreement with others as a teacher in your own sanctification? Is there anyone whom you need reconcile with? Are you allowing God to shape and mold *you* in your relationship with that person? Reconciliation is always the goal. But God is just as much in the process as He is in the end result.

Alright, I said brief, and I meant it. We now move on to verses 4-7.

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

Paul once again charges the Philippian church to rejoice (Ch. 1 v 18). It's important for us to remember that Paul is writing this letter from a prison cell. Paul's own precarious situation in prison shows us that he knew about hardship and trials too well and so could write with some credibility. If anyone could tell us to rejoice in all circumstances, it was Paul. This ongoing rejoicing cannot be based upon or grounded in the particular circumstances of the Philippian church. Rather, it is independent of them. But how can this be possible?

I think our answer comes from verse 5, because "the Lord is at hand." Some translations say "The Lord is near." What does Paul mean by this? There are two ways to understand this. First, when Paul says that the Lord is near, he could be referring to the actual close, intimate Presence of God with the believer. Echoes of this are found in Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted." Or Psalm 145:18, "The Lord is near to all who call on him."

Another way to read this is the second coming of the Lord Jesus. By "the Lord is near," Paul could be appealing to the anticipation of Christ's return and the hope that this entails.

I don't think we need to decide between the two. Both interpretations are theologically correct! God *is* near. And Jesus *will* come again! We rejoice today no matter what our circumstances because God is with us, and God will come again to restore all things under His mighty Name. Here is what Paul is saying:

God's Active Presence In Our Lives Is Our Joy and Peace

As believers in Jesus Christ, we ought to be the most joyful and thankful people on earth. Why do we rejoice? Because God is with us. Why are we thankful? Because the Lord is at hand. Why do we offer up our prayers to God? Because God is near. We can and should pray because we have a heavenly Father who

bends His ear toward us with pleasure when His children come to Him with their prayers and supplications.

This active Presence from God is the reason Paul says what he does in Verse 6. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

There it is. That tricky little word. *Anxiety*. We are going to discuss more later about being thankful, and what that means for our prayer life. For now, I’d like to have an honest talk about anxiety. What is it, and how does it affect us spiritually, and how does it affect the heart of God?

Now I can say with confidence that no one here wants to be anxious. But I’ve noticed in our world that we have a tendency to make excuses for our anxiety. I often hear things like, “Well, if I don’t worry about my children, who will?” Or, “I’m only anxious because I care.” Or perhaps you have heard yourself say, “I wouldn’t be anxious if I could just make ____ fill in the blank happen?” I personally struggle with anxiety a great deal. In my own moments of anxiety, though I would never verbally admit this in the moment, I hide behind the lie, “Well, worrying about this feels like the responsible thing to do! If I didn’t worry, I might drop the ball!” We make excuses for our anxiety and worry.

I’d like to propose something this morning that may at first seem controversial. But I want you to give me some time to flesh it out. Here we go:

Anxiety is sin. Now please don’t check out on me. Let’s take some time to unpack what I mean when I say, anxiety is sin.

Anxiety is a statement about God’s goodness. Rather, it is an accusation. The reason I believe that anxiety is a sin is because anxiety calls out God to be a liar. Anxiety questions the goodness and nearness of God that we just talked about. Anxiety says this, “God, *if* you were good, You would you make *this* happen. Or prevent *this* from happening.” Or here is something we often hear in the back of our minds at the onset of anxiety, “Does God really care about me? Does God have my best interest in mind?” Does that sound familiar to you? Genesis 3:1, the serpent posed the question, “Did God actually say...?”. Here is my point. When we choose anxiety and worry, we are accusing God of not being good enough or

strong enough to take care of our needs. Questioning and doubting God's character is a big deal. When we really take the time to get to the root of our anxiety, it will always lead to some mistrust in God's goodness and God's nearness.

So why are we anxious? Because we want control, and we realize we don't have it. Especially in our world today, we are *obsessed* with control. Anxiety wants to be God, but lacks God's knowledge, power, and wisdom. We want to control something, and yet are aware that we cannot control it, and thus anxiety grows in us because of the natural tension, which ultimately leads to more anxiety! It's an endless feedback loop that can feel impossible to get out of.

Here is what the great Scottish theologian Oswald Chambers put so well:

Worrying always results in sin. We tend to think that a little anxiety and worry are simply an indication of how wise we really are, yet it is actually a much better indication of just how wicked we are. Fretting rises from our determination to have our own way. Our Lord never worried and was never anxious, because His purpose was never to accomplish His own plans but to fulfill God's plans. Fretting is wickedness for a child of God.

So can we just call it out for what it is? Anxiety is sin. It is sin because it is

Anxiety Is Mistrust in the Goodness of God

Why else did Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit? Because they doubted God's Word.

Some of you may be thinking to yourself, "Logan, if you knew my situation, you would understand." Ok, you're right. Life is difficult and unpredictable. Listen, I consider myself an expert on being anxious! Seriously, if you want a crash course of how to worry about silly things, come to me! My wife can testify to this. I worry about my roof leaking. I worry about failing at my job. I worry about whether or not you guys like me. I worry about whether or not boxed macaroni and cheese causes cancer! The list goes on and on.

But here is the deal, God promises to take care of us, and when we choose to be anxious and worry, we are questioning God's ability to follow through on *His Word*.

A couple disclaimers that I want to touch on. First, there are conditions that require the help of medication. I have friends who are mature, Christ following people who take anti-anxiety medication. I believe there are medical conditions that warrant medicinal aid. God designed our bodies to operate with a balanced set of chemicals, and because of the fall, sometimes those balances get off. It is here that medicine can be a great aid to us. Medicine, prescribed by a trusted physician, when used appropriately, can be a gift from God. It is ok to take medication.

But, what is *not ok* is that the norm in our culture is to turn to medication, be it medicinal or some other worldly comfort (food, work, alcohol) *to fill a hole that only God can fill*. This is not ok. Medicine has a place, but it can never take God's place or be a substitute for God's peace in our lives.

Second, this passage is not a prescription that Paul gives to fix your life. I have had sleepless nights of anxiety, awake in my living room, I have read this passage and prayed my prayers with gratitude in faith...and I still struggle with the anxiety. It didn't just fix me. But, I still believe that peace is found in God alone. I won't find it anywhere else. There have been times where I have gone to God in times of anxiety and have found a peace the truly did surpass my understanding. Peace that I could have never found in anything else!

If you are hearing this today and you're thinking, "Well, I've tried that and it didn't work for me". My encouragement to you would be to keep going! Keep surrendering! The peace we are looking for is found in the surrender! Our prayers and supplications are not just, "God do this and do that." They are acts of surrender! The more we learn to let go and give our cares to a loving and caring heavenly Father the more we will feel safe and secure in His gentle care. Paul is not offering some one time silver bullet fix. He is not advocating a, "do this and you'll be good" solution. Paul is talking about a lifestyle. Every moment of every day ought to be filled with prayerful surrender to God.

I don't say these things to condemn you. Rather, I say these things to you today because of our final point.

God is Inviting Us to Repentance Through Prayerful Surrender

Anytime we face anxiety, God is inviting us into something deeper. If you are seeking God's peace in the method of trying to control God to get whatever you want, I would argue that you are missing the point of this passage. For Paul, the goal is not to bring our cares to God so we get what we want. As Sam said so well last week, God is the prize! Have you ever considered that the reason you don't feel peace yet is because you have yet to truly surrender? Here is what I'd like to propose: what if the peace we seek in God is found in better understanding our dependence on Him? Rather than just getting what we want.

Now here is what I am not talking about. If you recall back in chapter 2 of Philippians, Paul writes this concerning his desire to send Epaphroditus to them,

²⁶ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.

Did Paul have anxiety? Yes! Of course he did! But mind you, Paul practiced what he preached. This is from chapter 1,

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.

Do you see that? Paul *prayed* for the church. He did so with *thanksgiving*, and he did it while *rejoicing*.

Am I saying that every single time an anxious thought pops into your head that you are sinning? Not necessarily. But I do believe that in that moment, we have a choice. Dwelling on something out of a fearful desire to control, or prayerfully surrendering it to God. I can't draw that line for you. You need to listen to the Holy Spirit in regards to this. The point is not, "do everything you can to not be anxious." No, the point is to go to the Lord when you do. When you become aware of it, lay it down. Do you remember what Steve said a couple months ago, that if you know how to worry, you know how to meditate? Let us not meditate on what we can't control, but choose to give it to the One who can through our prayers and supplications.

Here is the thing. God knows all of our desires before we bring them to Him. God isn't surprised by what we ask Him. So why offer up prayers of supplication and

petition with thanksgiving? Because in doing so we are expressing our sincere dependence on His generous care over our lives. We must join thanksgiving with our prayers; not only to seek what is good, but to acknowledge our need and acknowledge the mercies we have received.

Why be thankful? Thankfulness restores the natural order of our dependence on God. Childlike dependence on God is not a punishment, but the Christian's greatest joy!

Notice how Paul says to not be anxious about *anything*, but in *everything* pray. Emphasis mine. He leaves no room for any exception here. Listen, I didn't write the book. There is no, "be worried about nothing, except for in situations regarding money and family." No, don't be anxious about anything. But in everything we need to pray.

What is Paul advocating here? I believe he is advocating that when we choose to surrender to God every anxiety and worry that comes our way, we are choosing a lifestyle of repentance. Does God really expect us to pray about every worry and fear that comes our way? Yes! He absolutely does! We should be that dependent upon God. Repentance through thankful prayer to God is no burden ya'll. God is worth it!

This isn't something we do once a week. Most of the time for me it feels like I need to repent every 5 minutes! Repentance for the believer in Jesus Christ should be like breathing. Inhale, exhale. The picture here is to live moment by moment aware of what my thoughts dwell on. "Ok, I am not God. I am only Logan and I am weak. God, I'm finding myself worrying about this. I am insufficient! Man, I really feel the temptation to control this. Holy Spirit, thank you for bringing this care to my attention. I know that you care for me and You care about this issue more than I do. I give this to you and lay it at your feet. I know and am convinced that this is far better in your hands than mine." Prayer in and of itself is an act of repentance. Prayer, with thankfulness, is the healing balm to life's worries and anxieties.

The way to be anxious about nothing is be prayerful about everything.

Now here is what we can expect...the more we grow in Christlikeness, the more the Holy Spirit is going to let you and I know when we are picking up anxiety. This is a great thing! God loves you so much that He is going to lovingly make you aware of areas of your life that are not yet surrendered to Him. And He will do this in the most gentle and loving way. When He does, rejoice! I say it again, rejoice! For when you feel anxiety come, know that God is inviting you into something deeper. He is inviting you into a more intimate walk of trust and dependence on Him. When we learn to surrender, when we learn to bring our cares to Him and let go of any end result and choose to entrust our lives to the Good Shepherd who knows every single hair on your head, we find the peace that surpasses understanding. We do this because we have everything that we need in Jesus.

He is where our confidence is found. At the end of verse 7, Paul says this is for those who are “in Christ Jesus”. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the reason for our peace. Romans 8:32:

³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Jesus experienced the anxiety of the cross so you and I would not have to! Jesus loves and cares for you so much that He would die for you to give you eternal life and a resurrected body. Why would we not also then entrust to Him all of the temporary afflictions of our lives? Jesus’ death on the cross was the ultimate display of how far God would go to bring us peace. But the peace is in *Him*. Not our circumstances. Why would He go to such extent to simply leave us alone in our everyday trials? It is not as though God is saying, “Ok, I’ll send my Son to die for you, but that situation with your coworker...that’s just asking too much.” No! On the cross, Jesus entrusted Himself to God. Why should we not do the same with everything in our lives?

Let us be resolute in our repentance of anxiety. Let us not just shrug off anxiety as some symptom of the fall that we fall victim to. Rather, let us hold fast to the care and protection of God, and fix our eyes on Jesus, who loves us perfectly.

I’d like to close today reading a passage from Matthew that for many of us is a well-known passage. As I read this, I’d like for all of us to close our eyes. Listen to

this passage as though it is the first time you have heard it. Listen to it with fresh ears. After I read it, I am going to give you a moment to practice what we've talked about this morning. Take a moment and bring your cares to God. What are you genuinely thankful for? What cares are on your heart today that you want to give God?

If you would, close your eyes as I read this:

²⁵ *"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?"* ²⁶ *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?"* ²⁷ *And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"* ²⁸ *And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,* ²⁹ *yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* ³⁰ *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?"* ³¹ *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"* ³² *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.* ³³ *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

³⁴ *"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

Take a moment now and talk to God about what your thankful for, and bring to Him your cares.

Lord heavenly father, forgive us when we don't believe in your promises to take care of us. Restore us to your goodness. Restore us to right thinking about who you are, and entrust to you all the details of our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.