

Prescription for Anxiety

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[0 : 00] Our text this morning is verses 6 and 7 of Philippians 4, and let's read them again together. Paul writes these words, 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.

And God will bless this word to our hearts this morning. Let's pray together. Almighty God, we bow in your presence this morning in the name of your Son, the Lord Jesus.

And as we come to your word, we pray for the illumination of your Holy Spirit. Help me to preach from it, to make it clear and plain. Help us to listen and receive it.

We pray, O God, that you will bless us today. In your name. Amen. Probably every one of you has been to see your GP at some time or another.

Now imagine for a moment that you're sitting beside me in my morning surgery, and a patient knocks on the door and comes in. A teenage girl, 25-year-old man, single mother, man nearing retirement.

[1 : 32] Doesn't matter really. Patients all look the same when they're worried. Tense, pale, sometimes tremulous, often tearful.

And they sit down and begin to talk. Hesitantly first and then, building up into a torrent of words, it all pours out. The exams. The difficult boss.

The new baby. The scan result. Parents in the nursing home. The cold and distant spouse. What are the symptoms? Worry.

Poor concentration. Sleeplessness. Restlessness. Thoughts of impending disaster. What's the diagnosis? It's anxiety.

Anxiety. Although you might never consider going to the doctor with anxiety, we all experience it. It's part of life in a fallen world.

[2 : 33] Not only has the fall affected the world we live in, but it's affected our response to life's difficulties and problems. And we all experience anxiety.

One thing though to understand, anxiety is a spectrum. And at the upper end of the spectrum, severe anxiety often goes along with depression.

And that can be a totally disabling condition that requires medication, psychology and sometimes even hospital. And I'm not talking about that kind of anxiety.

And this passage is not addressing that kind of anxiety. I'm talking about the kind of anxiety that we all face in response to life in a fallen world.

In his second letter, Peter tells us that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness. Through our knowledge of him who has called us by his own glory and goodness.

[3 : 35] Everything we need for life and godliness. So then, what has God given us for anxiety? Well, Philippians 4 verses 6 and 7 contain Paul's prescription for anxiety.

Here it is. Friends, I would never dare to tell you from this pulpit.

Do not be anxious about anything. Accept that these words are in the Bible. And while they come from the pen of the Apostle Paul, they ultimately come from God himself.

In any other context, they would be insensitive and unfeeling. But they are the words of the creator God who made you. Who knows you.

Who understands your struggles. And who knows your burdens. Psalm 103 says, As a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

[4 : 57] For he knows how we're formed. He remembers that we are dust. And these are his words to you this morning. Do not be anxious about anything.

Let's look then about what Paul has to tell us about dealing with anxiety. First, admit you're not in control.

Second, accept his control. And third, rest in his peace. First, admit you're not in control.

Think for a moment about the things that make you anxious. Your health. Your teenagers. Your relationships. The prospect of redundancy. Exams.

Your wife. Your husband. Your singleness. What do they all have in common? All these situations that make you anxious.

[6 : 03] That keep you awake at night. That constantly threaten you with what might happen. The scenarios that keep replaying in your head. The knowing fears that keep you from committing to that person.

Or that career. What do they all have in common? It's this one thing. That you are not in control.

You don't know what's going to happen in 2010. You don't know how things are going to turn out. You are not in control. And that's the single basic cause of anxiety.

Realizing that you're not in control. And it's made worse by our cultural presuppositions. We expect to be in control. If there's one poem that sums up the individualization of our western world today.

It's William Hindley's *Invictus*. And it ends with these lines. I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.

[7 : 06] And then, when things don't work out the way we planned, we are paralyzed with anxiety. I am the master of my fate.

Therefore it's all my fault. I am the captain of my soul. It doesn't work out. I'm a failure. Friends, you never were in control.

You never were the master of your fate. You never were the captain of your soul. That's the devil's lie again. Remember what he said to Eve in Eden?

Eat the fruit. You'll be like God. You'll be autonomous. You'll be independent. You'll be in charge. You'll be in control. It was a lie then.

And it's a lie now. We are not autonomous. We are not independent. We are not in charge. And we're certainly not in control.

[8 : 07] There's not a single area of your life where you have absolute control. You can exercise daily, eat healthily, think positively, and still drop dead from a heart attack.

You can give your children a loving home, a great education, still watch them grow up and drop out. You can invest wisely, invest cautiously, and still watch your investments crash in the credit crunch.

You can make careful travel plans for the holidays, and still the weather sells them all into chaos. When you think about it, you realize how little you actually control.

You're face to face with your weakness, your limits, your smallness. And that's exactly where Paul takes us. Look at verse 6.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God. And not a lot there about being master of your fate and captain of your soul.

[9 : 19] In everything, by prayer. And if prayer means anything, first it means that we are not in control.

Someone else is. It means that we are weak. That someone else is stronger. It means that we are limited. Someone else is limitless. It means that we are small.

Someone else is bigger. Listen to what Paul Tripp writes. You do not have to fear your limits. They were designed by the God who is the definition of everything that is knowledgeable, understanding, wise and true.

God made you limited in exactly the way you are. Your limits are meant to drive you in humble and worshipful need to the Lord for your rescue, restoration, wisdom and strength.

You know, admitting you are not in control can be scary. But from Philippians 4, admitting you are not in control is only the first step on the road to deliverance from anxiety.

[10 : 33] Just because we are not in control doesn't mean that our lives are out of control. There is one who is in complete and perfect control.

And that takes us on to our second point this morning. Accept His control. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Paul tells us to do something, to turn your worries and anxieties into prayers. You are to pray. You are to supplicate. supplicate. And that simply means to ask.

Why pray? Why ask? Because you are not in control. Because you have reached the end of your wisdom and power and endurance.

But God's wisdom, power and goodness has no end. And that is why you pray to Him to accept His control. That is why you make supplication.

[11 : 41] you ask someone who is greater than you for something you haven't got. And you simply don't have the resources to deal with the problems of life.

It is too big for any of us. Our own limits, our own lack of wisdom, our own lack of knowledge and power are to make us run to Him with our requests.

and there is nothing that is too hard for Him. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication.

Anything and everything. He is in perfect control over everything. His wisdom and power are unlimited. John MacArthur writes, people become worried, anxious and fearful because they do not trust God's wisdom, power or goodness.

They fear that God is not wise enough, strong enough or good enough to prevent disaster, to prevent disaster. But listen to the words of Isaiah in chapter 40 of his prophecy.

[12 : 58] Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary and His understanding no one can fathom. You can't fathom God's understanding. You can't measure its depths.

You can't get to the bottom of God's understanding. It says in verse 25 of the same chapter, to whom will you compare me?

Or who is my equal? Says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He brings out the starry host one by one and calls them all by name.

Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. And the heavens, the creation, testify to the mighty power of God.

[14 : 02] He has no equal. There is no one like Him. And best of all, listen to this. Same chapter, same God. Isaiah writes this.

He tends His flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in His arm and carries them close to His heart and gently leads those that are with young.

He's not only wise, He's not only powerful, but He's good and kind and compassionate. And you this morning are His flock, the lambs of His bosom.

He carries you close to His heart. He's wise enough. He's strong enough. He's good enough. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything let your requests be made known to God.

Look at that verse one more time. But in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[15 : 13] What is thanksgiving doing here in this verse? Why does Paul stop and tell us to give thanks? We're anxious.

We're upset. We're worried. We don't have time to stop and give thanks. Paul tells us to stop and give thanks because anxiety robs us of all perspective.

You've been there. your mind's in turmoil. Thoughts and fears race through your head and you're overwhelmed by the sheer weight of everything that's pressing down on you.

And things that are really trivial swell out of all proportion and loom in your horizons. And that's where thanksgiving comes in. It forces you to stop.

Stop dealing with the fears. Stop dealing with unknowns. Stop dealing with things that are subjective and deal instead with fact.

[16 : 17] And it confronts us again with real events in the past. It confronts us again with fact about God and what he's like. And it brings objectivity to our emotional turmoil.

Remember. Stop. Give thanks. Remember what God is like in his wisdom, power and goodness. And that's what Isaiah does in the verses we thought about already.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? Of course you've heard. Of course you know. Stop. Remember. Give thanks.

The Lord is the everlasting God. The creator of the ends of the earth. Thank him for all that he is. Remember real historical events in your past.

God has helped you. God has blessed you. Remember how he's forgiven you. Remember how he's adopted you and brought you into his family. And he's shown again and again in real historical events in your past that he loves you and cares for you.

[17 : 30] Give thanks. And then with a renewed sense of perspective you can make your requests to God. That's what Paul does.

He had many reasons to be anxious about the church at Philippi. They were under attack. Paul tells them in chapter 1 not to be frightened in any way by your opponents.

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction but of your salvation and that from God. For it has been granted you for the sake of Christ that you should not only believe in him but also to suffer for his sake.

They were under attack. They were going to suffer. And they had petty arguments and disagreements. In this very chapter Paul writes to two women in the church.

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. They cannot get on with themselves. Opposition outside the church.

[18 : 40] Division within the church. And yet Paul prays for them with thanksgiving. In chapter 1 verse 3 he says Paul gives thanks thanks.

And then Paul makes requests in verse 9. And this is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment that you may approve what is excellent.

By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving Paul lets his requests be made known to God. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God.

Accept his control. Let your own limited wisdom limited resources limited power drive you to him in prayer. Accept his limitless wisdom his limitless power and his limitless goodness.

He is in control. Third then rest in his peace. 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.

[20 : 26] What an exchange peace for anxiety. But look at what the verse doesn't say. Let your requests be made known to God and he will give you all you ask for.

Let your requests be made known to God and he will let you understand exactly why you're going through this. No it doesn't say that.

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.

He doesn't give answers in exchange for anxiety. He doesn't give complete understanding in exchange for anxiety. He gives peace in exchange for anxiety.

He gives peace to those who come to him trusting in his limitless wisdom trusting in his limitless power trusting in his limitless goodness.

[21 : 33] And what is the peace of God? William Hendrickson says it's the calm that follows Calvary's storm.

The calm that follows Calvary's storm. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. That wonderfully rich word that doesn't simply mean the absence of war but means rest and joy and well-being.

And when God created this world he looked at it and he said that it was good. And shalom God's peace God's joy God's sense of well-being pervaded the whole of creation.

It was good. Adam and Eve lived in perfect shalom. In peace and harmony with each other. Peace and harmony with the rest of creation.

Peace and harmony with God himself. But then they decided they wanted to be independent of God. They decided they could live autonomously.

[22 : 41] They decided they no longer wanted to live under God's rule and they disobeyed God and sin entered our world and shalom was gone. And sin has distorted and corrupted our relationships with each other.

And sin has distorted and corrupted our relationship with our environment. And most of all sin has destroyed our relationship with God himself. And we no longer have peace.

And there's no shalom. There's no rest. But God sent his own son the Lord Jesus Christ into this world to reverse the effects of the fallen to rescue his people.

And on the cross at Calvary all God's judgment for the sins of his people broke on the head of his son the Lord Jesus Christ. And the storm of God's righteous anger and wrath on account of our sin fell on him.

And he endured it all. He utterly exhausted God's wrath for our sin. And when he died God raised him from the dead proving that Jesus Christ had fully paid the price of sin.

[24 : 00] And through Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection God offers hope and forgiveness and renewal. And God is working to reverse the effects of the fall.

A new life in Jesus Christ offers us a glimpse into the future when God will establish a new world a new heaven and new earth that will be perfect and undefiled by sin.

A world marked by God's peace. A world marked with God's shalom. But here and now because of Calvary God offers his peace to his people to all those who are in Christ Jesus and that simply means all those whom God saw in Jesus Christ when he unleashed that storm of anger and wrath on him and for our anxieties God gives his peace the calm that follows the storm of Calvary a glimpse into the new creation no wonder that Paul says it surpasses all understanding you expect to be anxious when you're facing opposition and quarrels at Philippi you expect to be anxious when like Paul you're in prison facing an uncertain future you expect to be anxious when you're facing 21st century life in

Scotland instead to have the peace of God surpasses human understanding Calvin wrote nothing is more foreign to the human mind than hope in the depths of despair in the depths of poverty to see riches and in the depths of weakness not to give way Paul closes with these words and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus his peace is active his peace will defend you his peace will keep watch over you his peace will protect you where you're most vulnerable in your heart and mind you see his peace is inseparable from himself listen to the blessing of

Aaron the Lord bless you and keep you the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace and since it's the Lord who gives us peace who then can make trouble rest in his peace finally what does that peace look like it looks like Jesus Christ agonizing in Gethsemane praying father if you're willing take this cup from me yet not my will but yours be done and then rising from the garden bound taken to first to the chief priest then to Pilate standing before that crowd clothed in a purple robe and with a crown of thorns it takes him to

[27 : 36] Calvary there to offer his hands and feet to a cross and to pray father forgive them for they know not what they do it looks like Paul in prison chained between two Roman soldiers chained no prospect for release every fear of death and yet he writes these words for me to live as Christ and to die as gain it looks like the Philippian church facing opposition outside and quarrels within and yet prospering does it look like you in 2010 facing an uncertain future admit you're not in control accept his control his limitless wisdom his power his goodness and rest in his peace may you enjoy that peace today and every day in 2010 as with prayer and supplication you let your requests with thanksgiving be made known to

God let's pray together father father again we come to you this day in the name of your son the Lord Jesus we thank you for the wonder of your word which brings us hope which brings us assurance for our future father we thank you that it's a lamp to our feet and a light to our path we pray that this word might blaze on into the distance and to the days and weeks and months ahead in 2010 that you will walk with us and be with us as we ask it in Jesus name Amen