

## ANXIETY PT 2 PHILIPPIANS 4:4-8

NOTE: If you did not hear last weeks sermon, it is crucial to read the summary or listen to before this message.

Anxiety is an emotion, It is part of being human. It is not a sin. It can range in severity. When severe and impacting every day life it is considered a mental disorder

Jesus experienced anxiety in the garden of Gethsemane, So did Paul who wrote the passage we just read. Yet in 2 Cor 11:28 he talks of his anxiety for the churches. He is anxious when in 2 Cor 2:13 he could not find Titus.

First thing to note. "Do not be anxious about anything" is in the present active tense. ie Don't live in a state of continual anxiety. Most would agree that while we all experience anxiety, living in a continual state of anxiety is not good.

4 encouragements Celebrate God's goodness v4. Ask God for help. v6 Leave your concerns with him with thanksgiving v6 Meditate. Think about things that are good v 8

V7 the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds CALM Celebrate, Ask, Leave Meditate (from a book by Max Lucado ) this is not a magical answer that will make all anxiety disappear. For some God's healing will come through counselling, or medication. See last week

#### **Celebrate God's goodness.** V4

Are we meant to be happy when we get cancer? No. This is not about a feeling. This is a call to focus on the character of God. It is to remember what we believe. We believe God is sovereign. We are often anxious when things feel chaotic. But trying to deal with anxiety by controlling everything doesn't work. Control freaks are often very anxious people. The Bible's answer is to recognize God's sovereignty i.e. we are not in control. Prov 21:30 Dan 4:35 Lam 3:37-38. Jer 17:7-8

**Remember God's mercy** One of the causes of anxiety is guilt, failure, fear of failure and living a life of pretence. If we base our self worth on our actions, and what we've done, and what others think of us then we naturally are going to struggle with anxiety. There is a freedom when we experience God's grace. Phil 3:7-9

Rejoice in the Lord **always.** Not just on good days. Always. Is that even possible? We might be able to do it when life is good, but what about when it stinks? We wonder "Is there a God?". Christian say there is a God and he is involved in his creation. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Col 1:17 He works in all things for the good of those who love him. Rom 8:28 This is incredibly hard to believe but the Bible repeatedly teaches this. One of the most famous OT stories is of Joseph. He was rejected by his family, sold into slavery, falsely imprisoned. He could have been bitter about his experience. He could easily have lost any faith in God.

But instead he saw this life through the lens of God's sovereignty. "What you meant for evil, he says to his brothers, God has used for good." Gen. 50:20

So this "rejoice in the Lord" means to take our eyes off the problem and see God. Turn from the issue for a bit and focus on God. The more we look at an issue often the bigger it gets. This is what the Psalmist says in Ps 121: 1-2

#### **Ask. Present your request to God v5-6**

"Let your gentleness" - seems out of place. The NLT uses the word considerate. The meaning is the opposite of panicking. There is a maturity in how you react to the circumstances that is evident to those around you. How do we do that? Reminder that God is near. You might feel alone and that God has abandoned you. But repeatedly we find in the OT the phrase. Do not be afraid. I am with you.

When Jesus comes, God says he will be called Immanuel. Is 7:14 God with us. Why. Because God came in flesh, to experience what it is like to be human. In Gal 4:6 God is described as Abba father. In Heb 10:21-22 we read we can approach the throne of God with confidence. In John 14:17 we read the Holy Spirit lives in us. In tough times our anxiety is increased when we think we are alone. And we have to continually remind ourselves. God is present with me.

And because God is near, we can bring our requests to him. Be specific. God, I have a meeting with my supervisor today. She really scares me. Help me sleep well tonight Give me the words to say tomorrow so I can raise my concerns clearly. Give her a soft heart towards me. Help me to not get defensive about anything she says.

By being specific we are helping define what is making us anxious. Often anxiety is sort of ill defined. By asking "What would I need in order to not be anxious?" we bring the issue down to size and it then helps us see God at work. In the face of trouble, we can choose despair or prayer. Simple, specific prayer to the God who is near.

#### **Leave your concerns with him with thanksgiving.**

In the middle of Paul talking about anxiety are these words. With thanksgiving. Modern secular counsellors often encourage clients to keep a gratitude journal. Every day write down 3 things that you are grateful for. Gratitude is a mindful awareness of the benefits of life. Studies show that people who practise gratitude enjoy huge benefits

Anxiety often leads us to think "If only I.... then I would be happy." Our anxiety comes as we focus on what we don't have, and our striving to get what we don't have. Paul is saying as you are bringing your requests to God, focus on what you already have.



In failure we have the promise of God's grace. In sickness we have the promise of healing in this life or the next. In disappointment we know God's plans will work out. In betrayal, we have the promise of God never leaving us. There is power in thankfulness that is profound. The thing about thankfulness is that it anchors us in the present. Anxiety is focussed on the past or the possible future. Thankfulness helps us to see the good in the present.

### **Meditate on Good things v8**

There are a whole heap of things we have no control over. But we can choose what we think about. We are like the air traffic controller of our mental airport. We live in the control tower and direct the mental traffic. Thoughts circle around and around the control tower. We can give permission for a thought to land. We also direct a thought to leave.

To be free from anxiety requires that we think healthily. The challenge is not the issues that we face but the way we think about our challenge. Our thoughts can exaggerate things, or deny things, or catastrophize things. But we can choose our thoughts. Are our thoughts good? Are our thoughts right. Often with anxiety are thoughts are negative or simply not true.

2 Cor 10:5. Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. You are a failure. No, I am a child of God's. You will blow it. So what, Even if I do, God is still with me. It's a disaster. No, my future in God is good.

Write down your thoughts and consider them. Where did that come from? A person from my past? An experience I had years ago? Letting go of critical thoughts can be hard. But we choose to indulge those voices or reject them.

Replace the negative thoughts with true thoughts that are good. Find Bible verses that speak into the thoughts, and memorize them, carry them around with you. Let them remind you of truth of who we are and who God is.

Figure out what is feeding your thoughts. People, media? Avoid whatever is feeding your negative thoughts. You often have little control over your circumstances. Bad stuff happens in life. As Christians we don't get a free pass on this. But we can control our thoughts about such things.

This passage says that we can know a peace not from God but the peace of God that will guard our hearts and minds. A peace that is from the throne room of God. It is a peace that transcends logic. It is not based on our circumstances. Yes, we have to do our bit. But it is possible to know a peace that will surprise us. It is not a peace based on human achievement. It is a gift from God. Jon 14:27

Now this might not be your lived experience. Maybe you have struggled with anxiety for much of your life and so you think. Well God has not kept his promise. Or we think. Well, somehow I am not good enough to qualify for this peace. So let me say some things about this.

1. No one will truly experience peace on this earth. We might experience glimpses of it but none of us know it completely. One day you will be free from all anxiety and worry. For now, we are all a work in progress.

2. Everyone will be anxious about different things. There is generalized anxiety where we are generally anxious about everything. But often it is certain things in our life that cause anxiety. Differ from person to person.

3. Many have experienced times where we have had a sense of supernatural peace. It might not happen all the time, or only occasionally but many Christians can attest to it.

4. If look back and think. I don't think I have ever experienced this, don't beat yourself up or think you are somehow deficient in some way. We can't create this peace on our own. We can be obedient to these instructions but we can't manufacture peace. There could be any number of things going on for you, from past trauma to chemical disposition that make this hard. That is OK.

Celebrate God. Ask for what we need specifically. Leave the requests with thanksgiving. Meditate on good things.

It is not a magic formula but there are some keys here that can help us with anxiety. These are actions we can take. At times we can also know a supernatural peace, that is beyond our circumstances. We can't manufacture it. We will never know it perfectly this side of heaven. But we can press in to God to know it more.

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### REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

*Have you ever experienced a peace that was beyond your understanding?*

*In our heads we believe God is sovereign. When does this become a challenge? What can help us regain belief in His sovereignty?*

*How specific are your requests to God. Do they tend to be vague? How might being specific about what you need be of benefit?*

*How much do you practise daily gratitude? What could you do to make it a habit? What gets in the way of gratitude?*

*What things contribute to your negative thinking? How can we put vs 8 into practise?*

*What would you say to the person (or yourself) struggling with anxiety who says I have tried this and none of it works?*



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

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