

The Joy of Prayer in the Gospel – Philippians 4:6-7

Derek Berry
The Chapel at Pasadena
January 2, 2022

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please contact Pastor Derek at Derek@chapelpasadena.com.]

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Philippians 4:6-7...

Please stand for the reading of God's word:

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.

Well folks, it's officially 2022 and the pandemic is still going strong! (Whew)
Two years in, I think it's time for a new pair of running shoes. Amen, church? Thinking on the that alone is enough to cause someone anxiety, but I think we can all agree that on a personal level there are many other things that have caused us to worry and be anxious these past two years. For example, in 2020 my wife's health took a turn for the worse and it seemed to be a never-ending battle. And then we transitioned into unknown waters after Pastor Chuck's passing in 2021- new position, new city, new church, new home. Each of us here in this room have different COVID era stories to tell our grandkids one day, but we all have one common denominator- we are no stranger to anxiety, stress, and worry. According to the American Psychological Association, the range of average sub monthly percentages of U.S. adults reporting symptoms of anxiety increased from 28.2% to 37.2% from April 2020 to August 2021. So, as we prepare to dive into the text today, the question we should ask ourselves isn't "Has life circumstances caused me anxiety, stress, and worry", but rather "What does the Bible say about how I should view and respond to these feelings of anxiety or worry?" Today's passage will help us explore this question further, so let's take a closer look at the text.

Here are our three points for this morning, taken directly from what Paul discusses in the text.

- I. Perturbation (v. 6a)*
- II. Prayer (v. 6b)*
- III. Peace (v. 7)*

Let's start with the first, perturbation, which is just another word for anxiety that starts with a P. Paul provides the reasoning as to why we should not be anxious in verse 5, which we considered a couple of weeks ago. *The Lord is near*. Therefore, Paul's argument is that the nearness of God should bring us such a peace that absolves us of all and any anxiety. Now remember, it's difficult to ascertain what Paul means by this phrase. He's either speaking temporally or referring to proximity. Although both options are plausible, I believe proximity is the better option here.

Especially when you consider this command for the Philippians to not be anxious. The Lord Jesus himself makes a similar appeal to his disciples in John 14.

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. -John 14:25-27

There’s a striking similarity in this text. In John 14, Jesus is referring to his future nearness with his disciples that will be mediated through the Spirit. That’s one of the primary roles of the Spirit in the lives of believers. The Lord Jesus promises his disciples, both present and future, that he will be with them until the end of the age. How is he with us if he’s on the throne next to his Father? The answer is through the Spirit, who is sometimes referred to as “the Spirit of Jesus.” And in the words of J.I. Packer,⁷

[It’s not] that the New Testament writers saw no clear personal distinction between the Son and the Spirit, but rather that they saw the Spirit’s post-Pentecostal task as essentially that of mediating the presence, word, and activity of the enthroned Christ...By this I mean that the Spirit makes known the personal presence in and with the Christian and the church of the risen, reigning Savior, the Jesus of history, who is the Christ of faith. -J.I. Packer in Keep in Step with the Spirit

So, Jesus uses this truth of his nearness to buttress his command to his disciples, that they are not troubled nor afraid, in other words, “don’t be anxious in anything.” And then he mentions the peace he leaves with them, just as Paul ends this text mentioning the peace of God. Based on the continuity found with this Johannine text, it appears that Paul is indeed referring to the nearness of Jesus through his Spirit.

It’s the serenity that Peter should have had after getting off the boat to walk on water in Jesus’ direction. Any anxiety or stress that would have been provoked by the winds and waves should have been removed for the simple fact that Jesus was nearby. He was literally right in front of Peter. Well, although he’s not present with us in the flesh, the Lord Jesus would argue that what we have is of greater advantage than even the disciples themselves. Hence, if we truly grasp the love that Jesus has for us, and understand the Spirit’s abiding ministry, anxiety will not be an issue. And Jesus proved his love for his people on the cross. So, Paul provides us with the why in verse 5. We’ll consider the how in 6a, but let’s now look at the what in verse 6. ...*do not be anxious about anything...*

So, here’s the frequently asked question. Is anxiety sin? Well, I believe that it’s clear from this text that the answer is yes, as this is an imperative presented by the apostle Paul. Now let me be clear by what I don’t believe he’s referring to in regard to anxiety. Dr. Jeremy Pierre from Southern Seminary provides very helpful commentary when answering the question, “is worry a sin?” Which is practically the same question we’re seeking to answer. One of the points he makes is if by worry or anxiety, we simply mean negative feelings associated when something we value being threatened from external circumstances, this shouldn’t be categorized as sin. We

should be confident of this fact, simply because we find Jesus himself having a level of distress when something he valued was externally threatened. For instance,

I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! -Luke 12:50

The Lord Jesus knew the cross was coming. He valued his relationship with the first person of the Trinity, the Father, and he understood that the cross meant experiencing the wrath of God.

Hence, simply negative feelings concerning a particular circumstance that one may face is not in and of itself the sinful anxiety that's mentioned in this passage.

It's helpful to think of worry [anxiety] as a tactic of our fear. So, in other words, it's obsessing with our thoughts and our emotions about some threat to something we value. Something that we see as essential or want as essential to our very life. The problem or the sin that can be involved in worry [anxiety] is that we mix up what actually we most value for life and we forget God's role in relation to that value, what life actually is. -Dr. Jeremy Pierre

I think this is a very helpful while also proper explanation of anxiety or worry. We have to be careful not to respond like the culture with great anxiety and worry over circumstances that are out of our control. And even circumstances that are “in our control” for that matter. Worry and anxiety reflect very badly on our heavenly Father. My wife and I have a running joke about our eldest daughter. We say that her official government name is “I’m still hungry Berry” because at every waking moment she reminds us, that she’s still hungry. The timing of this statement is what makes it even funnier. For instance, she’ll wake up first thing in the morning and say, “I’m still hungry.” Honey, don’t you mean to say, “I am hungry”? Why would you be linking your present hunger to the day before? But what kills Krystal, and I is the anxiety that she exhibits when she’s hungry. She plunges into full despair when she wants food. Neriah literally acts as if her mother and I will allow her to starve to death. And what’s really embarrassing is when she does this in front of company. I don’t want others thinking that I neglect my child by failing to keep her stomach full. So, it looks bad on us as parents when she throws a tantrum in front of others. I have to remind her, “Neriah, do you know what your mother and I have done for you so far? The sleepless nights and sacrifices made thus far should calm your worried soul. If we would go to such great lengths to ensure your well-being, making a PB &J is nothing.”

Well analogously, when we allow anxiety or worry to rule our lives, we declare to the world that our Father isn’t enough to take care of us. This is where we must remind ourselves of the cross.

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? -Romans 8:32

Maybe you’re here and your battling anxiety due to the Covid situation we’re all in, or maybe you have financial worries, vocational stresses, family disfunction... Do you truly believe that any of this is more difficult than the Son of the living God going to the cross to take your sin? If he would go to great lengths to ensure your oneness with him, why would you believe that he wouldn’t keep you in your current season? It boils down to a trust issue.

⁶ *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. -1 Peter 5:6-7*

What does humility have to do with anxiety. Well, we're anxious because we believe that we're the ones who are ultimately in control, and therefore we worry on how a situation will be fixed by us. Peter would challenge this mindset in this text. He says, humble yourself by realizing you're not in control of anything, acknowledge the one who is, and trust him with everything.

The Lord Jesus spends a great deal of time on anxiety during his sermon on the mount. He employs the term anxious 8 times in this one chapter.

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. -Matthew 6:25-34*

We see eight reasons listed in this passage as to why we should not be anxious. For time's sake, we won't go through them all, but we see this is a significant issue in the ministry of both Jesus and Paul. But you may be thinking, "Pastor, you don't know my specific situation. It's easy for someone who dictated a letter thousands of years ago to make such a command." Remember the context of Philippians. Paul is writing in chains to a church who is facing persecution from the world. So, Paul wasn't lounging under a palm tree on Malibu beach sitting on a cool tree dictating, "don't worry, be happy!" Paul's entire existence was on the bubble of danger. Humanly speaking, few things were going right for him. And the residents of Philippi had worldly opposition to deal with, along with the poverty, hunger, and ostracism. So, he's not speaking of imaginary troubles or phantom anxieties. Paul was aware of the Philippians situation. And yet, he tells them, do not be anxious. Why? Because in our fallen state, we naturally respond to life's adversity with anxiety. If this wasn't an issue, Paul wouldn't need to instruct the church in this manner. So firstly, be encouraged that this is a sin that we all struggle with, including the most pious of believers. I can make a list of anxieties that I must daily lay before the Lord. Therefore, Paul isn't making light of the troubles these believers had to face, rather he was able to make this command because he knows that God is greater than all their troubles. This is the kind of attitude that the Psalmist describes in Psalm 112.

For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. -Psalm 112:6-7

I love this passage. The righteous is not afraid of bad news, due to their trusting in the Lord over against their anxieties. Notice, the psalmist doesn't deny the idea of bad news. And Paul doesn't deny anxieties in this world, he just tells us what to do with them. It's the "how" in regard to avoiding anxiety. This leads us to our second point this morning:

II. Prayer

but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

"In everything" stands in contrast to "not about anything," meaning all the details and circumstances of life. And some of us may scoff at the idea of prayer as an answer to anxiety. To be clear, this isn't a rejection of the idea that there are some believers who may need to be on medication due to a chemical imbalance. I don't believe the two are mutually exclusive, although there are some who would like you to believe so. Is it okay for Christians to take medication for depression or anxiety? There will be some who will say yes, as if that is the end all be all, removing God from the equation all together. I believe this to be error. And others who will say no, and the justification are passages such as these, which I believe is an error as well. We should avoid these simplistic answers. We can't control our spiritual agencies and functions totally detached from the bodily realities that God designed us to have. And the fall has corrupted our bodily realities. There weren't just spiritual disfunctions of the fall, but also natural and bodily actualities as well. So please don't hear me say that prayer must be detached from any types of medication. You shouldn't feel a sense of guilt if this applies to you. But also realize that medication doesn't cross into the deeper heart issues of perceiving the world in ways that God sees it. Therefore, this text is for you as well. But it doesn't just stop at prescribed medication, God has provided us with natural remedies that we mustn't ignore. Our spiritual responses, whether it be anxiety or faith, to situations in life is affected by sleep, the food we consume, drink, whether it's water for hydration, or coffee and alcohol, exercise, inactivity, and even weather conditions. We should utilize all the gifts that God has blessed us with in this life in order to abstain from anxiety.

But nevertheless, prayer is priority, otherwise Paul wouldn't have mentioned it. The sin of unbelief is made clear in our lives when we scoff at the idea of prayer concerning our anxieties. Someone will say, "I'll pray for you concerning this issue," and in our minds we think, "yeah but what are you actually going to do?" As if prayer is not doing anything. As if there is no efficacy in prayer. But let me ask you this. When was the last time you prayed explicitly and at length over the things that trouble and plague you? Did you consistently lay these burdens one by one on the Lord? Or did you tell others that you're praying about the situation, all the while spending more time worrying than actually on your knees? Our souls require time alone quiet before God where he speaks to us through his word, and we speak back through prayer. As busy Americans, our lives are constantly on rush mode, and we end up begrudging just a five-minute quiet time, and then wonder where God is. And yet the psalmist had it right,

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
2 I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." -Psalm 91:1-2*

Prayer is a way to acknowledge our utter dependence on God, while at the same time expressing complete trust in him. This is the admonishment.

prayer and supplication with thanksgiving

There doesn't seem to be any special significance to the fact that Paul employs prayer and supplication here. The first word is the more general use in the original language, and the second refers to a specific plea or request. Paul is most likely just emphasizing the need to pray. But then he does something interesting. He adds, "with thanksgiving." What does he mean here? Lack of gratitude is an important signifier within the Pauline Corpus. He would make the argument in Romans that this sort of disposition before God is the first step to idolatry.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. -Romans 1:21

It's this reason that Paul is constantly tying prayers and thanksgiving along with one another.

*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. -1
Thessalonians 5:18*

So many people ask the question, "what is God's will for my life?" Countless books have been written with the purpose of answering this question. Well, here you go! Paul says the will of God for you believer is to give thanks in all circumstances, because you're cognizant of the many blessings you've received from the Father above. And I believe to be even more specific, concerning this verse in Philippians, Paul is requesting for the members of this church to be thankful for the past faithfulness of God while in the midst of praying over their current anxieties.

If you're familiar with Marvel, you'll know that Disney released a streaming service a couple of years ago called Disney Plus. Marvel announced that their plan was to frequently release shows on this platform that would share a connected universe with the actual movies. The very first show was entitled *WandaVision*. The first three episodes were weird to say the least. They definitely didn't have the feel of a Marvel project. Particularly with this show, the producers were seeking to do something innovative and new. I recall quite a few of my friends on Facebook who were publicizing their criticism of the show, imagining that Marvel had missed a step. I remember making a Facebook post basically saying, "do you all not remember the past faithfulness and success of Marvel? Has it slipped your mind that Marvel doesn't miss, and that all they do is publish gold?" And it would have even been beneficial for me to have listed out all of the MCU movies that may have had a slow start but ended as classics. I ended the post with, I trust Marvel. And I'm thankful for the masterpieces that they've released so far that I've had the privilege of enjoying. And what do you know? *Wandavision* ended up being a hit that won MTV awards including, Best Show.

Well, like I did with *Wandavision*, Paul is wanting his audience to activate their spiritual camcorders and express their thanksgiving for all that God has delivered them from, and just blessings in general, and that will position their hearts to understand that the same God who was faithful to take care of our baggage back then, is the same God on the throne who can carry our worries and anxieties today. As a matter of fact, when you feel anxious, try starting off by just thanking God for all he's done. Start with salvific spiritual matters, and then shift to natural issues and areas that God has blessed you in. Just linger there before even bringing your anxieties before him, before you know it, you'll be reminded that God is always faithful to his people. And then do what Paul instructs, let your requests be made known to God. And the apostle is so kind to describe the result of such a response to anxiety. This leads us to our final point.

III. Peace

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

As I studied this portion of the text, I was blown away. And if I can be honest, I'm still trying to wrap my mind around this truth. I want to work backwards so I can present what I found so astounding last. Paul says that this peace surpasses all understanding. I like what Charles Spurgeon had to say concerning this passage,

It is not only beyond a common understanding, but it passes all understanding. Some have said it means that the ungodly man cannot understand it. That statement is true, but it is not a tithe of the whole meaning, for even he who enjoys it cannot understand it. It is deeper, it is broader, it is sweeter; it is more heavenly than the joyful saint himself can tell. He enjoys what he cannot understand. What a mercy that such a thing is possible, for otherwise our joys would be narrow indeed! Reason has limits for narrower than joy.

That's good! This is a peace that doesn't make sense to a world that's filled with anxiety based on legitimate and illegitimate reasons. As Adrian Rogers has said, "We have no right to be believed if we can be explained." This is why we don't respond like the culture when faced with the exact same adversities. But as Spurgeon said, it's not only the world that doesn't understand this peace, but it's beyond even the believer's understanding! What kind of peace could this be? We'll close with this answer.

He then says that this peace will guard (or garrison) your hearts and your minds. This term guard or garrison in the Greek is a military term that this church would have been very familiar with. The Roman garrison consisted of soldiers who stood guard over a city in order to protect it from outside attacks. Paul is saying, this peace of God acts as a garrison of soldiers, keeping guard over our thoughts and feelings so that we'll be safe against the assaults of worry and fear as any fortress. So, God the Spirit is making a promise through Paul the apostle here. One that we can grab hold of. Side note, in your personal bible study, be looking for promises to grab while reading. You can ask yourself after reading a passage, "*What sin do I need to repent of? What promise do I need to grab hold of? And how is the gospel exposed in this passage?*"

Well Paul is clearly providing us with a promise to grab hold of. This is not an imperative, but rather an indicative. Paul is not commanding them to have peace, but rather explaining the result of the former imperative. If we respond to our anxieties with thanksgiving and prayer, he employs his peace that will act as a garrison or guard for our hearts and minds, the central locus of our beings. Our hearts and minds control all of our thoughts and emotions. Therefore, we indeed need supernatural help in this area. And of course, he ends it with the term, “in Christ Jesus.” It’s these believers’ relationship to God through Christ, in whom they trust and rejoice, that’s the key to all of these imperatives and this affirming indicative. This would have distinguished Paul from both Hellenistic moralists and Jewish wisdom of his day. Here’s an example of the Greek thought of his day:

It is not our ignorance of the difference between good and evil that hurts us, so much as it is our failure to heed the dictates of reason on these matters and to be true to our personal opinions.

For Paul the secret to peace lies not in reason, but “in Christ Jesus.” Where does your peace lie? Maybe it’s not in reason, but rather your family. Or maybe your assets and wealth. Perhaps you find peace in controllable situations. If you’re here and you are not in Christ then I have news for you, you actually do have reason to worry and be anxious, because the wrath of God is on your head. Your peace is only temporary, and I’m willing to bet that even you realize this. Even you understand that there’s something missing to your place of peace. Well, this is God’s mercy if you do indeed realize this. Before we talk about the peace of God that Paul refers to in verse 7 of this chapter, we need to discuss the peace he mentions in Romans 5:1.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. -Romans 5:1

If you’ve never surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus through repentance and faith, you are still represented by your first father Adam. Adam rebelled against God, and since then has plunged humanity into complete and utter hostility towards God. This results in humanity deserving the wrath of God, literally eternity away from him in punishment. But the peace that Christians have is now attainable through the cross of Christ. God the Son became a man in order to show what peace between God and man was designed to look like. But at the end of his life, he experienced anything but peace. No, it was the wrath of God for our sins that he experienced on the cross. He became a substitute for all those who would believe upon him. So, if you are a nonbeliever, be primarily concerned with attaining this peace first.

But if you’re a believer, rest in this truth that Paul presents in the first portion of verse 7. The apostle is not referring to the salvific peace that exists between he and his people once they’re in Christ. He’s also not referring to a type of peace that he extends at arm length. Rather, Paul is referring to the tranquility of God’s own eternal triune being!

Have you ever been around someone who is just contagiously happy and funny? They always have a smile on their face and a joke on their lips. So much so that when you’re around them, you become just as happy as them? You’re invited into the very joy and happiness of the person

you're around. It's almost as if it's not your happiness you're experiencing, but rather the happiness of the one you're around.

Paul is saying that the God of peace, verse 9, is welcoming believers to share in his calm serenity that characterizes him. Imagine that! The triune eternal God who possesses this peace that surpasses our understanding, is offering us this very peace! We share the peace with each person of the Trinity! As I said, I'm still seeking to wrap my mind around this truth, but this should be incentive enough to respond to anxieties with thanksgiving and prayer. Beloved, I'm sure you have something in your life that you may believe is worth worrying over. I'm here to tell you that worry is an outward expression of distrust in God which leads to inner turmoil. Spending your time worrying is not only sin but hinders us from having a heart of thanksgiving and an inner peace. Faith and trust in our Heavenly Father is eternally rewarding. So, let's cast our cares on the One who cares for us as we welcome this new year and beyond. Ask God to show you how to honor him with every circumstance and every prayer.

Let's go before Him now.