

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

8: ANXIETY & THE PEACE OF GOD



Context & Historical Background

About 60 years after Jesus' death, Paul establishes the church of Philippi during his second missionary journey. Philippi was a colony of Roman rule at the time, so when Paul entered the scene he was met with resistance. But the church he planted continued to grow and remained faithful to the way of Jesus even after he left. Paul was later imprisoned for sharing the Gospel, and while there, this church had sent him a gift to support him. Paul sent back a letter, thanking the church for their generous gift, as well as encouraging them to continue persevering in their faith. He wants them to hunger for more, not just remain where they're at. He writes to encourage them to seek continued transformation, trusting that the Lord will work in them and through them to bring both will and works together for His good. He encourages them to seek peace and joy regardless of circumstance and be comforted by the God of all Peace.



Related Passages

Matthew 6:25-34 - He cares for the birds of the air, how much more does He care for you?

Psalm 23 - The Lord is my shepherd.

Joshua 1:9 - The Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

1 Peter 5:7 - Cast all of your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.



Key Terms

Peace: The Greek word (*eirene*) means to bring to completeness or wholeness; to restore.

Rejoice: In the Greek, the verb is imperative. Paul is telling the people to rejoice. This is a decision of faith and hope. And the "joy" in "rejoice" is not the same thing as emotional happiness. Joy is instead based on a deep contentment that is in the Lord despite our circumstances.

Peace: Peace is commonly misunderstood. The peace of God isn't a blissful, nothing-bad-ever-happens kind of thing. That much is clear from how much suffering Paul (and Jesus himself) endured. This kind of peace means trusting God's goodness in the middle of life's trials.



Key Themes

Anxiety: We're at a point in our culture where we have more to worry about than ever before.

We get more notifications, see more tragic news stories, and are less and less connected with face-to-face, meaningful relationships. College students specifically are at higher risk of experiencing anxiety than any other age group. Between applications, exams, trying to find new friends, figuring out your finances, and just adjusting to adulthood...there's a lot to keep up with. Not to mention health habits in college don't really look like getting enough sleep (#nocurfew), eating a balanced diet (@Canes) or hitting the gym (#tiredman). All of these contribute to feelings of anxiousness. In this passage, Paul is addressing a Phillipian church that was anxious. Let's be clear: they were facing resistance of the worst kind. They were being persecuted, often murdered, for their faith. We shouldn't merely compare our anxieties to theirs. But Paul tells them how to deal with it. He reminds them that God works all things together for our good and trusts that there is so much more when we allow God to displace worry in our lives. If so with them, how much more for us?

At the root of all anxiety, there's an underlying desire to control. We don't know what the outcome will be and it's something that is out of our control. We can't control how we'll do on that test, if we'll be offered the job at the end of an interview, or even that we'll be immediately find deep friendship in any community. Paul is reminding us that Jesus knows our needs, and he regards them as important. Even though we may have times where we're uncertain about how something will play out, we can't control the future. We can only trust the One who controls our future. The early church was being martyred, but Paul tells them the Lord is near. We aren't being martyred, but in our anxieties the Lord is near as well.

Jesus invites us to make our heart's fears, hesitations, comparisons, insecurities and anxieties known to Him, and He in return will guard our hearts and minds with the peace that can only come from him.

NOTE: An anxiety disorder is different than what Paul is talking about in Phlippians 4, so be cautious in making large blanket statements about anxiety here. Though what is true for normal levels of anxiety are still true for those who might suffer from an anxiety disorder, some of the application might look different. When people have an anxiety disorder we can encourage them to seek help and treatment. Seeing a doctor, counseling or taking medication are many ways in which God might work to help someone with an anxiety disorder find healing.

If you have someone in your group who you aren't sure where they're at with anxiety, here is a helpful link that can help differentiate symptoms between manageable anxiety and anxiety disorders <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/>

Prayer & Petition Paul reminds us that we aren't bound by our anxieties and our fears. He tells us to "present your requests to God." We're reminded we can turn them over to God and let His peace come into our lives. It's so easy to get caught up in our worries and letting our minds fester upon our present troubles, only to feel defeated by them. But, through prayer, we are invited to commune with the Father and be in His presence. We're invited to turn over all of our fears and anxieties and make our requests known before him. Only by meeting with Jesus in this place do we then begin to rest in His peace. Although there is much to worry about—studies, applications, navigating a dating relationship, financial struggles, family difficulties—we have a

Father who loves us. Paul challenges us to believe that we can bring our worries to him so that we don't have to worry.

This passage is a reminder of the importance of daily prayer. When we meet with Him in the quiet space and give Him room to meet with us, we're reminded of His goodness and mercies. Paul invites us to pray prayers of thanksgiving, reflecting and accounting of the blessings and the goodness of God in our lives. In thanksgiving, we can set our hearts on His abounding love and grace we've received, which we tend to forget all too soon. An attitude and disposition of thanksgiving directly contributes to an inward peace. Making this a daily habit will bring, according to Paul, a special kind of peace: the Father's peace.

Whatever is Noble: Paul is encouraging us to seek joy and rejoice always...this can be easier said than done. There are so many things to distract our minds and draw us away from the joy we have in Christ. So much of our culture pleads for our attention and models the opposite of what Paul is speaking to in verse 8. Culture can pressure us to consume whatever pictures, music, celebrity gossip, Netflix sensations, and viral videos that are put in front of us. But Paul is calling us to a different way of life: one that is focused on things which reflect His own characteristics—Goodness, Beauty, Truth.

Media doesn't have to be explicitly sex-obsessed or raunchy to be harmful to our souls (though those types of media definitely are). They can also convey harmful pictures of family or dating relationships or normalize behaviors that are destructive or overly dramatic or just unhealthy—from the way characters on a show talk to one another to the way you talk about the show with your friends. Media can also tempt us to compare our jobs, possessions, performance, and lives in general. We're always being exposed to advertising telling us we need more of something or someone. We can fall into two camps here: pride or low self-esteem. We find ourselves comparing how much "better" we think we are than the person at the top of our Instagram feed, or find that we doubt ourselves and quickly become insecure because we often compare the worst parts of ourselves to the "best" part of others we see on Social Media. Paul wants us to fill our minds with things that reflect God and draw our attention towards him.

BB Quotes & Illustrations

"Comparison is the thief of joy."

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

"The answer to deep anxiety is the deep adoration of God."

ANN VOSKAMP

"As you walk through the valley of the unknown, you will find the footprints of Jesus both in front of you and beside you."

CHARLES STANLEY

! Three Main Points

1. Anxiety doesn't have to rule your life, nor should it. Instead, surrender anxiety to God and accept the invitation to His peace that surpasses all understanding.
2. Practice setting your minds and hearts on the good things of God, and rid them of the things that draw you away from him.
3. Learning to turn to God in any situation is a huge part of becoming peace-filled people of God who do not fear but instead rejoice and take hope always.

? Discussion Questions

- What is anxiety?
- Do we see Jesus deal with anything that looks like what we think is anxiety? What did he do? What can we learn from him?
- Are you anxious? How do you know if you're anxious? When does worrying about the future become a problem?
- What are some things you think contribute to anxiety on a college campus?
- What role do you think social media plays in anxiety?
- What does manageable anxiety look like?
- How can you comfort a friend, loved one, or even a classmate that might deal with anxiety?
- Paul tells us (commands, even!) to "Rejoice!" What does this look like? How do we do this on a day-to-day basis?
- How is "thinking on noble things" supposed to really be all that helpful?
- What are the noble, lovely, pure, admirable, etc. things we can think about on a college campus?
- How is joy different from happiness in your life?
- Why is being thankful a remedy for anxiety? How can you practice being thankful?
- What do most of your prayers look like? How can the content of your prayers tell you about your spiritual life?
- Paul says to remain joyful always, even in suffering. What does that look like?
- What does it look like for the peace of God to reign in your life?
- What ways can you invite someone into the peace of God?
- Are there things in your life you need to surrender control over to God?
- It's okay to not be okay, but when should you seek help?
- What do prayers of thanksgiving look like for your life?
- How are anxiety and depression connected? What are the differences between them?
- Are there things in your life that are going unconfessed that could be causing anxiety? How does repentance turn us toward God?

▶ Application & Practice

Exercising & Eating Well: Several studies show that a well-balanced diet and exercise reduce

stress and can ease symptoms of anxiety. Get together with some friends and commit to giving up sweets for a week and eat more veggies, go to exercise classes together or for a walk at the Arboretum. Or if you're really feeling it—try both! Take note of how you're feeling before, during, and after and see the difference it can make.

Counseling. KeyCare has different connections to different counselors and is also a group of staff that are here to talk. Email keycare@ukcsf.org for more information.

Gratitude/Thanksgiving Journal. Start a gratitude journal, or just use your current journal, and begin each day by writing 5 blessings that you are thankful for to cultivate thanksgiving, reflection and God's peace in your life.

Social Media Fast. Take the next month by yourself, with an accountability partner, or your whole core group and fast from social media for 30 days. In this time, take note of how you feel before, during, and after the fast. If it helps, consider staying off for a little longer!



Going Deeper

Article: *Anxiety as a Spiritual Issue* – Relevant Magazine

Article: *Anxiousness and Anxiety Disorders* – Focus on the Family

Book: *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life* – Daniel Amen

Book: *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* – Peter Scazzero

Book: *My Name is Hope* – John Mark Comer