

Peace Through Prayer Philippians 4:6-7

And no storm, however fierce or violent,
Disturbs the soul that dwells, O Lord, in Thee.

Since we have been on the topic of prayer, I thought I might begin with a cartoon. It seems like these walruses have something else to worry about when they pray. Fortunately, that is something we don't need to concern ourselves with.

There is a part of the sea that is known as the "cushion of the sea." The surface can be a violent churning and broiling, heaving and pitching of waves caused by a tremendous storm. But down deep in this part of the sea, the storm never touches it. It is never stirred. It's been said that when the ocean floor of these deep places is dredged of plant or animal life, there is evidence that it has remained undisturbed for hundreds if not thousands of years.

In our passage today we see that it is through prayer that we can go deep below the troubling situations of life that otherwise would cause worry so that we remain undisturbed in God's abiding, sustaining, and calming presence.

Arthur Pierson writes "the peace of God is an eternal calm like the cushion of the sea. It lies so deeply within the human heart that no external difficulty or disturbance can reach it. And anyone who enters the presence of God becomes a partaker of that undisturbed and undisturbable calm."

Harriet Beecher Stowe put it poetically:

When winds are raging o'er the upper ocean,
And waves are tossed wild with an angry roar,
It's said, far down beneath the wild commotion,
That peaceful stillness reigns forevermore.

Far, far beneath, noise of tempests falls silent,
And silver waves lie ever peacefully,
And no storm, however fierce or violent,
Disturbs the Sabbath of that deeper sea.

So to the heart that knows Your love, O Father,
There is a temple sacred evermore,
And all life's angry voices causing bother
Die in hushed silence at its peaceful door.

Far, far away, the roars of strife fall silent,
And loving thoughts rise ever peacefully,

Our passage today is one of my favorites, and my favorite on the topic of prayer. It's found among Paul's letters and is addressed to the church at Philippi, yet it has relevance for us today for surely there isn't a day that passes that we don't need the promise contained in it. If you haven't already, this is a passage I would encourage you to memorize.

Philippians 4:6-8

We begin in **verse 6** by noticing that we are to give a thankful prayer.

I. WE ARE TO GIVE A THANKFUL PRAYER – v. 6

If I were to ask those who know you best, if you were to ask those who know me best, would they say that we have a thankful heart, especially when it comes to prayer?

Or do we allow circumstances to rob us of the joy we should have as we pray?

Paul reveals something that robs us of thanksgiving in our prayers. It's being anxious.

A. A Thankful Prayer Isn't Anxious – v. 6a

Let me begin by saying that this is a command. Your Bible might say "**be careful for nothing.**" "Stop being anxious." As it's stated in the NIV and other translations, the word means to be anxious, to worry, to fret. Other meanings include fearful, distressed, nervous, scared, or uptight. The literal meaning of the word is to divide the mind. James tells us that a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

On one hand a bit of fear can be a good thing. It helps us respect a situation, to take it cautiously. It helps us be more wary when driving on icy roads. It makes us respect operating a dangerous piece of machinery or being a zookeeper feeding the lions. Healthy fear makes us respect the inherent dangers because the minute we take something like that for granted is the minute something bad happens.

On the other hand, in a negative sense as it's used in our passage, fear and worry can paralyze us into inactivity or indecisiveness.

We worry about failing.

We worry about making a wrong decision.

We worry about getting into an accident.

Anxiety is the fear of what might happen. It's an unpleasant state of inner turmoil and includes subjectively unpleasant feelings of dread over anticipated events.

We worry about an interview.

We worry about a doctor visit.

We worry about our bills.

We worry about getting COVID.

We worry about having to speak in public.

We worry about our kids.

We worry about a test.

We worry about so many things.

It's been estimated that only about 8% of what we worry about every happens. That means that 92% is either imaginary stuff we think might happen, things that will never happen or things that are out of our control. Anxiety not only affects us emotionally or psychologically, it affects us physically with high blood pressure, heart disease or ulcers.

The Bible depicts anxiety as a normal human reaction to situations that are stressful.

Saul's father was anxious over his missing donkeys and then fearful when Saul didn't return in a timely manner (**I Samuel 9:5; 10:2**).

In **Psalm 94:19** the psalmist confessed having great anxiety within him.

In Scripture, anxiety is depicted as being inconsistent with trusting God.

The psalmist writes **"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts."** (**Psalm 139:23**)

Six times in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed His hearers not to worry. Each one is coupled with the exhortation to trust the Heavenly Father (**Matthew 6:25-33**). Jesus shows us how

often our anxiety is caused by an ungodly concern over provisions, performance or reputation.

Psalm 38:18 says anxiety can result from guilt. The child who does something wrong is worried about what punishment will be given when the parents find out.

An employee who does something wrong is anxious about losing his job when the boss hears about it.

Yet here is this command **"do not be anxious about anything"** and it means just what it says: be anxious for nothing. Let me put this verse another way: "If we don't pray about anything, we will worry about everything."

And if you are like me, worry is natural. It's a part of our DNA. It seems an impossible and unrealistic command. And it is, if it weren't for Christ, if it weren't for prayer.

Alexander Maclaren stated **"If our heart is not full of God, it will be full of worry."**

Martin Luther said **"If you don't put anything between two millstones, they will grind each other."**

Paul says that prayer keeps the worry from grinding us down.

H.A. Ironside asks the question we all have on our mind: **"How am I to obey an exhortation like this when troubles are surging around me, and my poor, restless mind will not be at peace?"**

Paul tells us that instead of being anxious, we need to pray. A thankful prayer isn't anxious because a thankful heart asks.

B. A Thankful Prayer Asks – v. 6b

Someone has rightly said "why worry when you can pray." **But do we pray?** Let me repeat something I said a moment ago, but state it in a different way: When we worry, we don't trust God. It implies that God is either unwilling or unable to tend to our needs, to be concerned about our welfare. If that's the case, we might as well take a knife to our Bibles

and systematically begin to cut out the verses that tell us about God caring for us.

I Peter 5:7 “Cast all your care on Him, because He cares for you.”

Hebrews 13:5 “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

Isaiah 41:10 “Fear not for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Joshua 1:9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Psalms 23:4 “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me.”

Someone went through the Bible and found 365 verses that tell us not to be afraid, or that we should take courage because God is with us. You may only need one or two or three to keep handy each day for those times when the enemy wants you to doubt God’s care for you. We need to realize that anxiety and prayer are two opposing forces in the life of the Christian. And according to this passage, thanksgiving is the antidote for anxiety.

In Pathway to Power on Wednesdays we have been discussing the armor of God. Our current topic is on the helmet of salvation. When we put on this piece of armor it protects our minds from the doubts and worries that the enemy wants to subject us with so that we end up not trusting God, believing that God has somehow abandoned us to our own fate or is incapable of keeping us protected.

Our passage tells us to pray with thanksgiving.

1. Pray with thanksgiving

This is a general term for prayer and encompasses all kinds of prayers. Please notice that we are to pray about everything, but the key is that when we pray it is to be accompanied with thanksgiving. Prayer is our approach to God and **Hebrews 4:16**

exhorts us to come into His presence boldly, not arrogantly, but with a confidence that stems from our position as His children.

God delights when His children come to Him in prayer asking what they will when it is His will.

John Newton penned these lyrics:

Thou art coming to a King!
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

When life events occur that would otherwise cause us to worry, bring them to God with thanksgiving. Prayer implies our dependence on God as we approach Him with humility.

Thankful prayer affirms God’s sovereignty over our trials, especially when He allows them for our good as we see in **Romans 8:28**. When our prayers are offered with thanksgiving, they are like the wings of a bird that help it fly.

We are to pray with thanksgiving.

Paul then says we are to petition with thanksgiving.

2. Petition with thanksgiving

This emphasizes being specific in what we pray for. It’s highlighted by the word requests. It’s more than asking God to bless the missionaries or provide for the Smith’s or be with my family. This is where we pray for specific things.

“Lord, be with Jen Janes as she teaches her children and continues her language studies and manages care for Josiah during those episodes of migraines. Pray that she might know Your all-sufficient grace through it all.”

“Lord, protect Mark Fleming from COVID.”

“Lord, would you bring healing to Sarah Kremhelmer from her pneumonia.”

“Lord, would You comfort the Taylor family during this time of family loss in Paul’s passing.”

Be as specific as you can with each request.

For example, if you read **Colossians 1:9-14** we discover the specific requests Paul made on behalf of the church there.

If you read **John 17**, we learn how Jesus prayed for His disciples and all who would follow Him. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago about taking the promises in the Bible and petitioning God on behalf of others or yourself.

A specific request for me would be to pray according to **II Timothy 2:15** that as I study and prepare for each message, I would accurately handle God's Word.

Thou art coming to a King!
Large petitions with thee bring;

I didn't do it this year, but in past years I have contacted each of David's teachers and asked them for specific requests for their class during the year.

It is one thing for me or Pastor Jim to reach out to our missionaries and ask for specific requests. But how encouraged they are when church members send a note asking for specific requests.

This past week we received a letter from Theresa Hendrick at Quiet Place Ministries. They just found out that some extensive dental work Brian must have done will cost \$20,000. That is a specific need to pray for.

And again, Paul links our petitions with thanksgiving. But remember, when we give God our petitions, leave them with Him. They aren't a yo-yo for us to take back. And neither is it a fishing line you reel back in when your prayer isn't answered.

Psalms 55:22 says that God will sustain us when we cast our cares on Him. That means He will keep us from worry. Giving a thankful prayer will lead to gaining a transcending peace.

II. WE WILL GAIN A TRANSCENDING PEACE – v. 7

Let me begin by saying that peace is not the absence of conflict. We might experience peace on a secluded beach in the Caribbean or deep in the forest standing knee deep in a river with a fishing rod in hand. Peace of mind is not a psychological state we experience, like some insurance companies

claim when you sign up with them.

Biblical peace, the kind of peace that Paul is referring to is an inner tranquility in the midst of our circumstances. It's a quiet spirit that transcends our trials and tribulations.

Notice that this peace is supernatural.

A. This Peace Is Supernatural – v. 7a

Paul says it is **"the peace of God."** We can't get this peace from any other source. It doesn't come through repeating some phrase over and over. We won't find it in the self-help section at the bookstore. We won't find it communing with nature. Its only source is supernatural – it comes from God. Now, in order to receive the peace of God we must first have peace with God.

Paul tells us in the book of Romans how we can experience peace with God.

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

This peace comes from God to those whose sins are forgiven through faith in Christ. At that moment we are made right with God. The peace of God means we never have to worry about our eternal destiny. It is sealed in the finished work of Christ on the cross when He took on Himself our sins.

Ephesians 2:14-17

Colossians 1:19-22

The peace we have with God through Christ frees us from accusation that would otherwise condemn us to an eternity separated from Him.

When we have peace with God through the salvation He has offered us, we are then able to experience the peace of God. If we don't have peace with God, we will never have the peace of God. And God has promised us that as we come more under the control of His Spirit, He develops the fruit of His peace in our lives as Christians.

Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace..."

John 14:27 says that Jesus gives us peace as a gift. It is unlike any peace the world may try to offer.

Isaiah 26:3 says that the person whose mind is steadfastly trusting in God will experience perfect peace.

This peace is supernatural. It can only come from God when our prayers and petitions are offered with thanksgiving and we are walking with Him.

One author said that peace is “the opposite of anxiety, it is the tranquility that comes when the believer commits all his cares to God in prayer and worries about them no more.”

God is the author of our peace. This peace is not only supernatural, we see that it is superior.

B. This Peace Is Superior – v. 7b

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding.”

God’s peace is beyond human understanding. We can’t begin to comprehend it and while we may not be able to explain it, we certainly say that we can experience because it says so right here in our text. The wisest philosopher and the smartest psychologist will never be able to grasp the depths of God’s peace.

Romans 11:33 “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.”

The infinite Creator God has an infinite peace that is beyond our ability to comprehend and it is ours when we offer our prayers and petitions with thanksgiving to God.

It will never come in the bottom of a bottle or the end of any string of earthly relationships. You won’t find it after a long and storied career or traveling the seven seas. It’s not found in ancient religions or the collection of sacred writings. We can’t bottle it, peddle it or define it. We can only experience it when we are in a right relationship with the One who gives it. It is as the hymnist stated peace like a river that washes over us.

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

No matter what you are experiencing, have you taken it in prayer to God, thanking Him for it? Have you left it there with Him and if so, are you experiencing His peace?

This peace is supernatural.

This peace is superior.

This peace is security.

C. This Peace Is Security – v. 7c

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

It’s a military term meaning to protect or garrison by standing guard. In other words, it surrounds you.

God’s peace protects our heart and mind, which is another way of referring to our emotions and thoughts. Worry does not come from God. Worry comes when we are not allowing God to settle or protect or secure our thoughts and emotions.

William Hendriksen writes “the man of trust and prayer has entered that impregnable citadel from which no one can dislodge him, and the name of that fortress is Jesus Christ.”

When we worry, it’s because we have opened the door and stepped outside of God’s protective peace. His peace will shield you from all the efforts of the enemy who wants you to fear and falter in your faith.

When we give our prayers and petitions with thanksgiving, we gain transcending peace that is supernatural, superior, and security for our hearts and minds so that we won’t be anxious. Someone has rightly stated and is good for us to remember: **“We cast our anxieties on Him, because He is never anxious.”**

In John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, Christian was taken to a large upper room that faced the sunrise. And the name of the room was Peace.

When we give a thankful prayer, we gain a transcending peace. **Verse 8** then points to growing through transforming persistence.

III. WE GROW THROUGH TRANSFORMING PERSISTENCE – v. 8

My Bible footnote reads “**Whatever a person allows to occupy his mind will sooner or later determine his speech and actions.**”

Stephen Covey in his book 7 Habits of Highly Effective People writes: “**Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.**”

There is a correlation between one’s thoughts and one’s life. When we think about the virtues listed here, we will produce a wholesome thought pattern that will transform our minds and hearts with God’s peace. This will in turn produce a godly excellence. In other words, as Paul writes, he provides us with principles that will transform our thinking from what would otherwise bring worry. Instead, we will experience the peace of God.

The word “**whatever**” is plural suggesting that with each virtue several additional things can be implied. The word “**think**” means to dwell on, to consider and implies an action associated with it. Jesus said that whatever a person thinks in his heart, that is what he is. In other words, avoid wrong thoughts by thinking about what is good.

We are to think about the things that are true as opposed to what is false or dishonest.

Ephesians 4:25 “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to His neighbor.”

It means reading, studying, analyzing, and meditating on it as the Bereans did in **Acts 17:11**.

Think about what is noble and honorable or what is worthy of reverence and respect.

Think about what is right. This speaks of things that conform to God’s standard that come from His unchanging nature. They refer to right living, not

according to what man says is right, but what God’s Word says is right. It’s right conduct and character that bring Him joy, that pleases Him. They consist of our thoughts, words and actions.

Think about what is pure or wholesome, unmixed with things that are impure.

Think about what is lovely. This speaks about the things that promote peace instead of conflict. Things like being gracious and patient. Scripture says as far as it depends on you, live in peace with each other. That means it’s up to you.

Think about what is admirable which refers to what is positive and constructive not negative or destructive. **Proverbs 1** tells us not to throw our lot in with those who would lead us into sin.

Thinking about these things are both excellent and praiseworthy or commendable. Let these virtues be your habit of thought. Be deliberate in what you think about. It’s been said that idle hands are the devil’s workshop. So is an idle mind. **Romans 12:2** tells us to transform or renew our minds through the Word of God. The key to godly living begins with our thinking, what’s in the heart.

Proverbs 4:23 “Above all else guard your heart, for out of it are the wellsprings of life.”

What you think about affects how you pray and whether you will pray with thanksgiving. When you think about what is right, your prayers will result in a peace that settles your otherwise anxious heart and you will find that place deep in your soul that is unaffected by the storms of life because God has settled it or protected it with His peace. These verses help us see that we can know a deep peace through prayer that comes from God through Christ.