

R12.2 October 2024 Blog God's Solution to Anxiety

Phil 4:6-7:

Be anxious for nothing, 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 minds through Christ Jesus.

The people around me seem to be more filled with anxiety than ever. Between the angry people yelling at us on 24-hour news stations and technology that is constantly demanding our attention, it is difficult to remain joyful and avoid being anxious. The election and international wars and tensions only add to the stress.

Per Webster's Dictionary, anxiety is "apprehensive uneasiness or nervousness usually over an impending or anticipated ill"; and "an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physical signs, by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it." External and/or internal stressors can easily stir fears of something bad happening over which we have little or no control.

God addresses this issue directly in Phil 4:6-7. We've probably all read this verse many times and maybe even memorized it. Nonetheless I think it's worth a fresh look to see if we can glean some new insight. So, let's break it down:

Be anxious for nothing.....

Note that this is a command, not a suggestion. Among other things, this means that with God's help it is possible for us to do this. He would not command us to do something that we are incapable of doing. We are not victims of our emotions. Our emotions are controlled by our thoughts. Our thoughts are controlled by our minds. And our minds are controlled by our wills. Thus it is possible to avoid anxiety if we truly desire to do so.

(Please note that I'm not claiming to be a doctor or psychologist, and I'm not talking about clinical depression. This is all in reference to people coping with life's difficulties, not medical conditions.)

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

God wants us to bring every aspect of our life to him. Not only our praise and joys, but also our fears and challenges. The Christian life begins and ends in relationship to God. He already knows our every thought, motive and emotion and yet we are called to present them to Him

through prayer. Verbalizing our emotions helps us to recognize and identify their source, the first step.

...with thanksgiving...

To come before God with thanksgiving in the midst of anxiety-causing circumstances requires us to stop and gain perspective. It requires us to see the bigger picture and recognize the many blessings we enjoy. To do this, we must focus on God's promises:

- that He is in control and has our best interest at heart,
- that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28),
- that He has a purpose for allowing tribulation in our lives (Rom 5:3-5),
- etc.

To be joyful and thankful in times of stress and tribulation requires faith that God will fulfill His promises. It also requires perspective, to see beyond the immediate problems to the bigger picture of God's mercy, grace and love.

...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding...

God's thoughts and ways are so much higher than ours (Is 55:8-9). He frequently answers prayers differently than we ask Him to or expect. We must remember that only He knows what is best. So many times, I have been grateful that He didn't do what I asked, but rather provided something that was much better for me in the long run.

...will guard your hearts and minds...

God promises to protect our hearts, i.e. our emotions, through the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit. As noted above, our emotions are controlled by our thoughts, mind and will. Using these resources combined with faith, the Holy Spirit can protect us from feelings of uncertainty, fear and lack of control.

He also protects our minds by helping us to logically identify the source of our anxiety and to address the underlying issues. Frequently this is by helping us maintain a proper perspective, realizing that, while we are not in control, God is and therefore there is nothing for us to be anxious about.

...through Christ Jesus.

Ultimately, the key to peace of mind lies with Jesus. He alone is the way to the Father and without Him, true peace is only an illusion. Any other source of peace will fail, so we must put our hope in Him.

Conclusion:

As we apply these verses in our lives, we soon realize that it is not effective to try to stop thinking about something. By the very act of trying to not think about something we are in fact thinking about it. Paul recognize this, so the very next verse in the scripture gives us the solution of what might be called replacement therapy. Philippians 4:8 says:

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.”

So then, once we have followed the steps described in verses 6-7 above, we should then replace our negative / anxious thoughts with positive ones as described in verse 8. Through an act of our will, we can trust in God's promises and meditate on things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous or praiseworthy.

My prayer for you is that the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.