From Anxiety to Peace (Phil 4:6-7)

Anxiety, stress, worry, and fear are huge issues in our world. Pastor Mike Riccardi cited a secular source estimating 43% of Americans are on mood-altering medications for issues related to anxiety, and 40 million Americans are considered to have anxiety *disorder*. Almost 20% of the population they give psychological diagnoses to, and call anxiety the most common 'mental disorder' in the country. WebMD.com calls the USA 'The United States of Anxiety.' According to a study in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, $42 billion is spent on anxiety disorders in America annually.[1]

Phil 4:6-7 gives free biblical counseling for anxiety and a peace surpassing all understanding (and drugs for peace). I'm no doctor. I'm just Phil, not Dr. Phil. I don't know or have expertise on medications you're on, but I know the Great Physician offers transformation, hope and help in His Word for anxious ones like me.

I'm reading the NAS ShepCon Preacher's Bible: *[6] Be anxious for nothing, 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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

The Dr., Martyn Lloyd-Jones, wrote that this text 'is undoubtedly one of the noblest, greatest, and most comforting statements which is to be found anywhere…from the standpoint of our practical experience, nothing has greater comfort for God's people than these two verses….[anxiety he says] is perhaps more problematic than any…other…the tyranny of circumstance ...nervous solicitude, tending to brood or ponder…meditate overmuch upon …morbid care...lying awake and you would have given the whole world if you could only sleep, if you could but stop the heart and...mind from going ...But your mind would not let you sleep, your heart would not let you sleep ...imagination comes in and you begin to think, 'What if this or that should happen?'...You go on thinking for hours, agitated by these imaginations...in that state we are useless...We may appear to be listening to [others] as they speak in conversation but our mind is chasing these possibilities..."[2]

The doctor diagnosed me pretty well! I need this study, and so do you. Even if our weaknesses differ, even if you haven't struggled in this area recently as I have, you will (future uncertainties, relational or personal difficulties, a difficult conversation, test results, financial or physical issues, waiting, etc.)

The context before this is in v. 2-3 is interpersonal peace, v. 6-7 moves to internal peace. The context before this in v. 4 commands us to *rejoice in the Lord always*, and he says it again. To rejoice is a choice. *Always* includes when anxious. Paul comes back to that in v. 6 saying in all things we're to pray with thanks to God. And the end of v. 5 reminds us *the Lord is near*, a fact we often lose sight of when we become anxious. And for us who feel we can't do that v. 6 says, or are anxious about our needs, v. 13 says we *can do all things through Him* and v. 19 adds *my God will supply all your needs.*

If v. 6 is a challenge for you, if it's hard for you to be anxious for nothing, if you struggle to turn off anxiety, you're in good company. Paul who wrote v. 6 confessed *'there is daily pressure on me of my anxiety'* (2 Cor 11:28 ESV). David, the man after God's own heart, wrote: '*I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin'* (Ps 38:18, the Greek translation of the OT uses same word as Phil 4:6). Ps 94:19 '*my anxious thoughts multiply within me...*' David's son Solomon said '*Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down*' (Pr 12:25). Mary the mother of Jesus, the most blessed among women, can relate to moms anxious about and agitated over a child, as she said to young Jesus: '*Son, why have You treated us this way?...Your father and I have been* ***anxiously looking for*** *You*' (Lk 2:48). One of Jesus' closest most beloved friends was guilty of this in the midst of stressed busyness serving: *'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things...'* (Lk 10:41 ESV).

Jesus Himself was tempted to anxiety in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was in agony, in great distress, and deeply troubled, but He modeled for us how to go to the Father in prayer, which is what v. 6 calls us to do. Isa 9:6 says Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor and the Prince of Peace for our peace and counsel. The writer to Hebrews says Jesus was tempted in every way like us and can sympathize with our weaknesses. That includes our anxieties and distressed troubled souls. Jesus can 'bid our anxious fears subside.' We're in good company. When you're anxious, you're not alone, the Lord is with you as v. 5 says. He's near, He's at hand to help us in v. 6 for the peace of v. 7.

But you must turn from sin and trust Him as Lord and Savior to have this peace

He's the Lord who says in Isa 41:10 '*Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not* ***anxiously look about you****, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*' That same Lord God is at hand in v. 5 when we're all fearfully anxiously looking about. He is with you! His strong right hand will strengthen your hand and uphold you. Isa 35:4 '*Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God…'* That's what His Word will help us prayerfully do.

Anxiety is powerful but there's greater power in prayer to our mighty Lord. This is critical and pivotal for our witness. Look at v. 5 right before v. 6: *Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.* That's not just believers, everyone is to see this about believers, how we can have a gentle reasonable calm spirit when all around our soul gives way, because the Lord at hand is our hope and stay. If the world sees that in us, then they might ask the reason for that hope in us. If they see the peace of God that transcends their understanding guarding our minds, if instead of anxiousness they see a calm steadiness in the midst of chaotic stressfulness, they'll notice. And we'll see platforms to point them to the God of peace that surpasses the world's comprehension.

There's a powerful image in Phil 4:7. The peace of God, this *shalom* for the whole body and soul includes wholeness, wellness, and healthiness instead of anxiousness that's so unhealthy in every way. As we give thanks to God, He gives us His peace that surpasses all comprehension and that guards our hearts and minds. If all this isn't motive enough, our witness and our Lord, v. 7 adds a 3rd motive: transcendent peace. The powerful image is guarding, like guards protecting what's valuable, that's what this God-given peace is doing to protect our hearts and minds in Christ. That Greek word *guard* was used of stationed troops that might form a garrison around a city, a battalion of Roman soldiers, military sentinels, security forces to keep intruders out.

That's what God's peace does for our minds, keeping out intruding anxious thoughts. It's as if God dispatched us heavenly peacekeeping special forces. Hendriksen wrote: 'God's peace will mount guard at the door of the heart… that impregnable fortress from which no one can dislodge…Peace is the smile of God reflected in the soul…the heart's calm after Calvary's storm'[3]

Look at Col 3. Keep a finger here but flip forward just a few pages to Col 3. The same Lord who said to a storm on the Sea of Galilee, '*Peace, be still,'* the One who ruled the wind and seas below, can also say be still to my soul. Col 3:15 *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.* That's how we in everything give thanks and how peace guards and governs our hearts. So go back to Phil 4 but that parallel passage helps us let peace reign and it will help me to actually teach it with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

For the time we have left, I want to just give you an explanation of each part of v. 6 and then illustrations from the psalms, from old hymns we sing, and from newer spiritual songs I pray give us powerful hope and practical help.

4:6 *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication …* Notice the word order. To put off anxiousness in anything we need to put on prayerfulness in everything. And before supplication or requests, v. 6 starts with a general word for prayer, worship, approaching God's presence as His child is the idea. We need to come first in praise and worship before coming with petitions and wants. Before we're requesting of the Lord in v. 6 we're called to be rejoicing in the Lord in v. 4. Prayer is much bigger than asking God, it's also adoring God, hallowing His name, praying for His kingdom purposes to come (not ours) and His will to be done on earth (not my will). Then we pray for Him to give us our daily needs, but Jesus taught that order

Don't fly past that word prayer to supplication, think of prayer in everything biblically that defines prayer. And if you're anxious, prayer first means you repent of being anxious before you request what you're anxious about. So if we're to teach with psalms, Ps 38:18 helps: '*I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin.'* Confess your sins of anxiety. Another psalm to help us pray is Ps 139:23: '*Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.'* Peter was teaching with the psalms when he wrote in 1 Pet 5: '*humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God …casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.'* He's quoting or paraphrasing psalms like '*cast your cares/burdens on the Lord'* or '*roll onto Jehovah thy way'* (Ps 55:22, 37:5 YLT). It takes work to cast or roll a heavy stone, and if it rolls back, we need to prayerfully roll it again to Him!

So much of our anxiety is from bearing burdens God doesn't call us to bear! So Scripture says '*humble yourselves…casting all your anxiety on Him…'* Humble yourself, you're not God, you're not in control and aren't supposed to be. You can't know the future and you were never meant to bear burdens alone! So cast all your anxieties on Him who is God, who alone knows the future, who is in control, who can carry that load and who cares for you! As John Piper explains it: 'undue worry is a form of pride … pride does not like to admit that it has any anxieties. Or that we can't take care of them ourselves … the way to battle the unbelief of pride is to admit freely that you have anxieties, and to cherish the promise of future grace in the words, "He cares for you." And then unload your fears onto his strong shoulders.'[4]

Ps 131 says '*O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; Nor do I involve myself in great matters, Or in things too difficult for me. Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; Like a weaned child rests against his mother…'* Other translations say '*I have stilled…my soul…'* (NIV) and '*I do not … concern myself with things that are beyond me. Indeed I am…like a young child carried by its mother; I am content…hope in the LORD…'* (NLT). I love that image, like an anxious fearful little one can learn to breathe and lean on his mother calmed composed, a child of God can learn to breathe in prayer to quiet his soul as he leans on his Father's everlasting arms, resting content in Him. God calls you to humbly leave the difficult great matters beyond your ability to the care of Him who cares for you and carries you.

Psalm 55 sounds like what would be called today an anxiety attack: '*My heart pounds in my chest. The terror … Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can't stop shaking. Oh, that I…would fly away...How quickly I would escape…But I will call on God, and the LORD will rescue me…and keep me safe…Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you*' (NLT). That's what Peter paraphrases: 'cast all anxieties on him who cares for you'

How much does He care for you? Ps 103: '*as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love…As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion…for he knows how we are formed'* (v. 11, 13 NIV). Other versions say God '*knows our frame,'* in other words He knows how we're wired, He's compassionate to His child's fears or phobias that frame how they think or the ways their brains had formed. Past traumas and triggers have affected a number in this room, and there are special needs in our midst that increase anxiety based on the physiological, not just spiritual. Whatever the case, God knows and has great compassion and care for you, so cast your anxieties on Him and be comforted in Him. Ps 94:19: *In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul* (NKJV).

Brian Borgman writes on that verse in his helpful book *Feelings and Faith:* "I overcome anxiety by focusing on the consolations, the promises…" … return to the oxygen truth of God's character. When the emotional hurricane winds of fear, anxiety, and worry assail us…run into God and his character like someone would run into a strong tower seeking refuge from a storm [as the Psalms say]. When we are focused on him, we are assured that we are safe, and we no longer fear. Safety calms our fears…"*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you"* (Ps. 56:3)…fight fear, worry, and anxiety with faith in God's promises and with confidence in his truth. As our minds are renewed

with…promises of his Word, we find an emotional security. "*In God I trust; I shall not be afraid…"* (Ps. 56:11)…Promise after promise is designed to kill fear and neutralize anxiety and worry. God's promises kill fear because they remind us who God is and what he is like, that he is near, and that we find our security and peace in him. "*I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears"* (Ps. 34:4). We obey the commands by faith and own the promises through prayer, and we experience his peace.'[5]
The Psalms show us how to pray, and so do good hymns and spiritual songs

A hymn we sang today: 'Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail, Standing on the promises of God.'[6]
We sang: 'what depths of peace, When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in all, Here in the love of Christ I stand.'[7]
A spiritual song we sang: 'When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast;
When the tempter would prevail, [Christ] will hold me fast.
I could never keep my hold Through life's fearful path;
For my love is often cold; He must hold me fast.
He will hold me fast [2x] For my Savior loves me so.'[8]

The same Ps 139 that prays to God '*know my anxious thoughts*' says to God '*your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast'* (v. 10 NIV). Ps 91 adds '*he holds fast to me in love…*' and in the shelter and shadow of the Almighty we can '*say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." … under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night…the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday'* (ESV). That's a poetic way to say the Lord holds fast from anxieties trying to attack

If you memorize Phil 4:6, don't forget the phrase right before *be anxious for nothing* at the end of Phil 4:**5**: *the Lord is near/at hand*. He's the Lord who said He holds us in His hand and no one can snatch us from His hand as He holds us fast. We need to mentally picture him always at hand, like Ps 16:8: *I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure'* (NIV). He's the Lord who said in Mt 6 (ESV) '*do not be anxious about tomorrow…do not be anxious about your life…which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?...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?... 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? Therefore do not be anxious…Do not be anxious about tomorrow…'*

Mt 6 is the same chapter where Jesus taught us how to pray to our Father, the Father who knows our daily needs, and tomorrow's, and will meet them. The power of prayer isn't in us or about us changing things so we get what we anxiously want, it's God powerfully changing us to His will being done. Phil 4:6 *be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication …* That moves from prayer in general to specific petitions, or the end of the verse calls them *requests…to God.* One version has 'ask God for everything you need.' That ties in with v. 19 that says God will provide all our needs.

The phrase at the end of v. 6 *to God* is actually literally 'before God' or 'in His presence,' like Jesus who is *with God.* The idea is coming in fellowship and a close relationship. Biblical counselor Ed Welch explains in his *Guide Away from Fear and Anxiety,* Phil 4:6 'means you should speak to the King about your worries. Here is a way to picture what you are doing when you pray: you are coming before the King…he invites you to come to him with your burdens, and he invites you to cast those burdens down. At first you assume that his servants will carry them away, but the King actually comes close to you and takes the burden onto himself…your worries on himself.'[9] My sovereign King is also my loving Father who answers better than I ask!

But don't miss an all-important word in v. 6: …*in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.* That connects to the phrase *in everything,* it includes things you're anxious about. Thank God for the very things you're anxious about because He's sovereignly working all things together for the good of those who love Him, namely to make us more conformed to Christ (Rom 8:29). Don't come to the King with just your complaints, come with your thanks. Come in grateful humble faith that He'll answer your concerns. Listen to Ps 138: '*I will bow down toward Your holy temple And give thanks …On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul. …Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand…The* LORD *will accomplish what concerns me.'*

[Ps 42 shows how to preach to your troubled soul, '*I will praise Him*']

in everything...with thanksgiving is closely related to v. 4 *rejoice in the Lord always.* Prayer without thanksgiving is like a bird without wings. It can't fly but Ps 119 says we '*rise to give thanks'* (119:62) and '*have great peace'* (v. 165). Giving thanks is wings for our prayers to make them rise to heaven and then it's as if the Spirit of God descends like a dove with peace. God's peace that surpasses all comprehension comes down as the prayers go up. Anxiousness weighs us down but thankfulness lifts us up. God's blessings of peace come down as prayers of thanks go up with our petitions and cares.

We could see that in psalms as well as hymns like 'those whose anxious spirits burn…
…Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, Thy wings shall my petition bear
…I'll cast on Him my ev'ry care, And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer.[10]

'Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly
And you will be singing as the days go by'
If anxiety has you, as the old hymn says 'tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done'[11]

This command to give thanks in everything presupposes God is sovereignly in charge of everything and is good and wise and loving in everything that comes our way, including what tempts us to anxiety. Spurgeon helps us in how to pray this way: "'Lord, I am poor; let me bless thee for my poverty, and then, O Lord, wilt thou not supply all my needs?...Lord, I am ill; I bless thee for this affliction, for I am sure that it means some good thing to me. Now be pleased to heal me, I beseech thee!' 'Lord, I am in a great trouble; but I praise thee for the trouble, for I know that it contains a blessing though the envelope is black-edged; and then, Lord, help me through my trouble!'[12]

That peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ, like a security guard, or like secret service protection detail. It's been pointed out as Paul wrote v. 7 he 'was in a Roman prison and could look right at the soldier charged to keep him safely in protective custody. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote…this peace of God will walk around the ramparts and towers of our life. We are inside, and the activities of the heart and mind are producing those stresses and anxieties and strains from the outside. But the peace of God will keep them all out and we ourselves inside will be at perfect peace…in Christ…'[13]

And then we can lie down in peace, resting our head like a pillow on God's providence. Ps 4:8 says from a grateful and glad heart: *In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For You alone, O* LORD*, make me to dwell in safety.* As you go from here, think about the anxiety or care you bear, as we'll sing:

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!
Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer…
Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Are we weak and heavy-laden, Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—Take it to the Lord in prayer;

Let's take our cares now to Him who cares for us, then I'll close in prayer.

[1] Mike Riccardi, "Anxious for Nothing," www.sermonaudio.com
[2] Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Life of Peace,* p. 165-69.
[3] William Hendriksen, *Philippians,* p. 197.
[4] Piper, *Future Grace,* p. 94-95. https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-cares-for-you
[5] Brian Borgman, *Feelings and Faith: Cultivating Godly Emotions,* p. 129-130.
[6] Russel K. Carter, "Standing on the Promises."
[7] Getty Music, "In Christ Alone."
[8] Sovereign Grace Music, "He Will Hold Me Fast."
[9] Edward T. Welch, *When I Am Afraid: A Step-by-Step Guide,* New Growth Press, p. 82.
[10] William Walford, "Sweet Hour of Prayer."
[11] Johnson Oatman, "Count Your Blessings."
[12] C. H. Spurgeon, "Prayer, the Cure for Care," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 40 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1894), p. 115.
[13] Timothy Z. Witmer, *Mindscape: What to Think Instead of Worrying,* p. 22-23.