

## Hope In The Dark

Philippians 4:4-8

Worry, stress, and anxiety dominate the American culture, even among Christians. 50 million people feel the effects of panic attacks and phobias each year. Anxiety is a meteor shower of what-ifs. A suspicion, an apprehension. We're living in unprecedented times and it is ripping people apart! Everything around us is uncertain and unsettling. We just don't know what's going to happen next, and fear is dominating our lives.

The word "anxiety" comes from the Latin word that means "to choke" or "to squeeze." Its strong grip interrupts your sleep, chokes your energy, and harms your overall well-being. Fear and anxiety are close cousins. Fear sees a threat, and anxiety imagines one.

The word "worry," anxiety, means "to be torn in two." Worry is concern on steroids. Worry is concern that's gone haywire. There's a difference between concern and worry. Concern is, "I have an issue in my life that is troubling me, and I am setting forth a plan as best I can to address it." That is legitimate concern. We worry about our money, we worry about our health, and we worry about our relationships. We're worried!

Worry is where the concern controls you. It takes you hostage and takes your peace and your freedom. You can't sleep. Because of the concern, you can't control your temper. Because of the concern, you're losing your ability to cope. Worry has now become the controlling factor because of the issue, whatever it is that you face.

It is dictating who you are, where you are, how you function, and whether you function. It tells you if you can get up in the morning and tells you, you better go to bed right now. We find ourselves under the stranglehold of worry. It owns you. In introducing this section, Paul says, "For this reason," and then he tells you don't worry.

Goals for today:

- See God and myself in a new way.
- Embrace the life God has given you.
- Find encouragement for your life.
- Experience more peace.
- Sleep better and smile more.

Paul found himself in Rome as a prisoner locked up in house arrest to a different Roman soldier every eight hours of the day. From this prison, Paul penned these encouraging words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the church in Philippi, "*Rejoice in the Lord always.*" In good times, we rejoice, and in more difficult times, we rejoice. We rejoice when the economy is strong. We rejoice when the economy is weak. We rejoice when we are well and healthy and when we are sick. Philippians 4:6-7 is the most highlighted scripture passage in digital Bibles.

*"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."* Philippians 4:4-8

Sometimes we still get a little bit worried. Sometimes we battle anxiety. If you look at any form of news, you're going to be bombarded with stress-inducing news. There are different levels of anxiety. Some of you, your life is not that bad. Others of you, you're worried that you might be sick, or you've got some relatives that are sick, or you've lost a job, or you have the potential of losing a job. Some of you, you're battling anxiety and

depression, and you're not even sure why you are. It feels like we're under attack. We're worried, we're afraid, and we're anxious.

How can we be “anxious for nothing?” Three great pieces of advice you can remind yourself with.

### 1. Don't Panic, Pray.

Sometimes things get so unbearable this bit of well-meaning encouragement can feel like a slap to the face.

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition.”* Philippians 4:6

When the Apostle Paul writes, *“Be anxious for nothing,”* he doesn't mean “Never feel anxiety.” The way that he constructed his Greek verb, it means, *“Do not allow yourself to be perpetually anxious.”* Don't allow yourself to slip into a mindset of perpetual anxiety.

Our anxiety-driven world is a place of chaos. Researchers always point to the fact that our world has changed more in the last 30 years than in the last 300 combined.

- It's a fast world.
- We are bombarded by news and information (often negative and critical).
- It's a secular society.

Secularism drains the peace out of people because we don't have a way of coping with the fears that come. People in third-world countries are far more at peace – and battle lower levels of anxiety than Americans – even though they have so many fewer of the conveniences that we do. When they come to America, their anxiety level picks up, as if our anxiety is contagious.

The devil is busy, and he is active. He is on the attack. He attacks people with anxiety. He attacks people with fear and worries. Peter writes to people who are under attack and suffering. His primary focus is that the attack of the enemy often manifests itself in an overwhelming sense of anxiety.

*“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, and he will lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”*  
1 Peter 5:5-9

Peter was a fisherman, and he's talking about casting. You can imagine him taking this fishing net and just hurling it out into the sea. Hurl your anxiety, your cares, your fears, your worries, and your burdens on God because He cares for you. Wherever you are. He is with you. He's not going to leave you. He will never forsake you. He cares for you. If you're worried about how you're going to feed your kids, He cares for you. Then Peter gives a warning and he says, “Be alert. Be on your guard.”

Be ready with prayer, be ready with praise, be alert, and be of sober mind. Why? Because you have an enemy, the devil, who prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. The devil is always coming after you.

Sometimes in crisis people say, "All we can do now is pray." In other words, you're in big trouble, all you've got is the power of God. Prayer is never a last resort. Prayer is always a first line of offense. We can pray. We can

go before our God in prayer. We are people of prayer. We're going to the All-Powerful, All-Knowing, Ever-Present God, with Whom nothing is impossible.

Go to God like the persistent widow in Luke 18 who comes to Him again and again with this relentless type of faith and prayer. Pray from the heart, from the depths of the soul, and cry out to God in anguish, "Help! Send help. I need Your mercy, and I need Your grace."

We have the armor of God, and we can pray in the Spirit at all times, believing that our God is with us. Pray. Thank God for who He is, not just for what we see. Thank Him for His character and for His nature.

"Petition" is sometimes translated as "requests" and is a word that means "itemized list".

26 in the New Testament we are told "ask."

"You have not because you ask not." James 4:2

## 2. Don't Be Pessimistic, Praise God!

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* Philippians 4:6

To reduce stress in your life you must change the way you think. We have a natural bent toward the negative. We don't see the good immediately. We see the negative. This is how the devil attacks. He target is your mind, and his weapon is his lies. He'll tell you, "You're not going to be able to pay your bills. You're not going to be able to make rent. You're going to get sick. Your marriage is not going to survive this. You can't be forgiven. You're not a good person. You're going to be all alone."

These thoughts left unrestrained in our minds become strongholds. We believe them and accept them. We have to go to God and take it to Him in prayer and with praise.

Paul wanted to go to Rome to preach and, instead, he found himself in Rome as a prisoner. He was locked up, waiting potential execution. Things had not turned out the way he planned. He leaned to praise God in the moments and circumstances he could not understand.

*"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear."* Philippians 1:12-14

He knew that God was working for his good. **"Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."** 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Don't let the anxiety of this world overcome the peace that God gives you in your heart. What do you do? You pray to God about everything. Wherever you are, praise Him. Praise Him today.

When you pray and you praise, you start passing from fear to faith. You start moving from worry to His peace.

You are more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus. The devil's always swinging. You don't drop your guard. We pray and praise, and the peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. That's why the Apostle Paul said, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, with prayer and praise, present your request to God, and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds, in Christ Jesus." With Christ, we will get through this. Don't drop your guard.

*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Romans 8:35-39

### **3. Don't Live In Prison, Live In Peace.**

*“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 4:7

When we don't have peace, we assume the problem is within us, which makes us to feel guilty. Anxiety is an option, but the Prison of Anxiety is not an option. Paul's prescription for anxiety is to *“Rejoice in the Lord.”* This is not a call to a feeling, but to a decision. This decision is based in the deep belief in the sovereignty of God over our lives. The more we believe in His control, the more we relinquish our control.

The result of rejoicing, prayer and praise is peace.

*"I will keep him in perfect peace whose mind has fixed on me."* Isaiah 26:3-4

2 Thessalonians 3:6-8 *"God gives peace in every circumstance."*

Prayer and praise are the pathways from panic to peace.

What does peace do? Peace guards. Peace guards your hearts and your minds. Whenever anxiety attacks, don't drop your guard. Peace guards you. What brings peace? Prayer and praise bring peace.

You feel panic. You feel anxious, you feel worried, you feel afraid.

What you feel is panic, but what you want is peace.

How do we get this peace? Peace is preceded by prayer and praise.

The promises of God guarantee peace of mind. People are looking everywhere for peace of mind. They try pills, fads, therapy, rock crystals, stress reduction seminars and listen to tapes, books -- anything to give just a little peace of mind. Paul says, God's peace is a gift to you. It is a gift that cannot be explained, duplicated, fabricated or understood.

How do I maintain that kind of peace?

*“...the peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 4:7

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. But in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.”* Proverbs 3:5-6

You have to believe God is who He says He is. He is capable. He is willing, and He is able. I will give God what I cannot do, and no matter what, I will trust God.