

“Peace.”
Philippians 4:2-9

Introduction: Pg. 982. Connect Card.

It was the first semester of my doctoral studies at Southeastern Seminary. I did not realize that I had bitten off more than I should have tried to chew but I quickly found myself treading water. Rather than taking the safer two seminar route and ease into the program, I went ahead for three: Integrative Seminar, History of Preaching, and Hermeneutics. Now I know, in retrospect, it just so happens that my first of six semesters in the program was the most labor intensive of them all. I had produced 180 pages of work in my first eight weeks of the program. I was working full-time, serving in my church, and trying to be a decent husband. Marsha and I had only been married 3 months.

Then came my first presentation in front of a world-renowned NT scholar by the name of Andreas Kostenberger on a book that was, at the time, very difficult for me to digest. In fact, I'm pretty sure that book digested me. I was incredibly anxious. In fact, the night before, I'm pretty sure I had an anxiety dream, you know the kind where you dream you are in a situation where you are unprepared or underperform.

Why was I anxious, you ask? Perhaps I feared I would be exposed as not being able to cut it, or maybe I feared the consequences of a poor grade, or maybe I feared that all the hard work would be in vain. It was probably all of the above and then some...

Have you ever felt like this? Anxiety is a fact of life.

Anxiety is an emotion produced by future fear and opportunities for anxiety are boundless: Health. Relationships. Financial woes. Big Decisions on horizon. Situations at Work. New experiences. Flights. Tests. Parenting. Performances. Snowstorms in March. The list goes on...

Consider this: In general psychiatric outpatient practice, anxiety disorders comprise up to 40% of new referrals. AND Among mental disorders, anxiety disorders are the most prevalent conditions in any age category.”
(Research from Dr. Atturpurath)

Whether anxiety is an occasional challenge or a dreadful nemesis in your life, I believe our study in Philippians 4 can help us experience God's peace on a daily basis. Anybody want that? Me too. In these verses, Paul is going to tell us that...

The Point: Without the peace of God, there is no peace within.

Read 4:2-9

These words come like a series of rapid-fire exhortations. On first glance, they seem to be a disconnected series of encouragement, but the thread of peace ties them all together.

T: I want to give you three truths to help you alleviate anxiety and possess the peace of God: God desires our peace. God gives us peace. God is our peace.

I. God desires our Peace (4:2-3, 6).

First we see God desires for us to experience...

Peace w people (2-3)

- Unity has been a dominant theme in this letter.
 - Hey, have “one spirit, one mind, striving side by side.” (Philippians 1:27)
 - Now we have a final call for unity applied to a very specific need in the church: two women, clearly two servant leaders in the church, Euodia & Syntheche, were not in sync. They lacked a common mind.
 - And this is serious business, so much so that Paul “entreats,” “urges,” “pleads” with them to agree.
 - He understands relational disharmony can be destructive, to them and the church as a whole.
 - Can you imagine sitting there and being called out by Paul? What started as a personal spat has become international known! :)
 - By the way, if you have a conflict with someone else, it’s probably well known to others.
- No one is immune to this.
 - These women were leaders in the church. They served with Paul, side by side.
 - Their names are recorded in God’s book, “the book of life.”
- How would they come to agreement? Paul calls in a mediator, who he refers to as “true companion.”
 - Sometimes bringing a conflict to light can help resolve the issue.
 - Let me ask you this: if your current conflict with a friend, roommate, or spouse was brought to light, would you be motivated to resolve it?
 - That only increases when you bring in a reasonable mind who desires the good of both parties.
 - Why? It is easy for us to get clouded by a self-centered perspective. It is easy when we’re in the thick of it to feel justified in our position, BUT there is a 98% chance we are not 100% right. Did you catch that? 98% chance we are not 100% right.
 - In other words, we all have need of change, growth, something.
 - It’s not about taking sides. It’s about getting on God’s side.
 - In fact, it’s not about being right. The mature person says, “It’s okay if you show me I’m not right.” “In fact, it’s okay if I’m right, but that never gets acknowledged. What matters is that *we’re right.*”

App:

- If you have conflict with someone, go to them and work through it. If you can’t work through it seek help.
- In light of these two verses, let me ask you this: “Do you see yourself as a threat to the unity of your church?” (Merida/Chan) You should! And so should I.
- BUT - you also should see yourself as a catalyst for unity! Be someone who presses deeply into relationship. Be someone who resolves relational friction quickly.

God wants all of our relationships to thrive, especially those in HIS church.

T: But it’s not just peace with people. He also desires...

Peace within (6) — Read 6a

- Anxiety happens when we fear potential consequences of unmet desires.
- Anxiety is future oriented. This is why Ed Welch, a Biblical Counselor who has a very good book titled, *Running Scared: Fear, Worry and the God of Rest*, says: “**Worriers are visionaries minus the optimism.**”
- Anxiety carries the ability to show up in any circumstance.
 - You’re rich: anxious about how to keep your money. Not rich: anxious about how to make more money.
 - For someone oppressed, they are anxious about how to get their freedom.

- But “with freedom come[s] more choices, which means more opportunities to get it wrong.” (Welch, Running Scared, 20-21). This is one of the reasons Kierkegaard said “Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.”
- Anxiety feels like a war in our souls. It can toss us about, like those 53 mph wind gusts yesterday pushing our car around on the interstate yesterday.
- The Bible compares it to a weight. **Proverbs 12:25** says: “**Anxiety weighs down the heart.**”
- A fleeting anxious thought can trip us up, but ongoing anxiety can crush us.

What makes you anxious? And have you considered what anxiety could be saying about your heart?

- Think about this: Anxiety usually surfaces when what we value is threatened: a Relationship, a Job, the bottom line in our bank account, our reputation, our need for acceptance or applause, or comfort.
- That is why anxiety often reveals what we idolize, what we are trusting in more than we are trusting in God, what we are elevating higher than God.

T: But *even in spite* of how many times we have forfeited peace through our conflict or giving into anxious thoughts, not only does God desire our peace, but...

II. God gives us Peace (4:4-7).

How do we get PEACE?

- Peace is often so elusive and fleeting. Many of us would confess that we often feel like we travel through life in a state of disequilibrium.
- We all want that consistent inner calm, but how?
- Today, many would say: Pills will fix it. Just workout. How about a glass of wine? Maybe breathing techniques or a perhaps you simply need stronger willpower.

Paul has a different solution.

How do we get Peace? Prayer - read v. 6 “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication [that’s prayer] with thanksgiving let your requests [that’s prayer] be made known to God.”

- What’s the solution? Prayer. Prayer. And more prayer.
- He triple-decks three terms: prayer, supplication, requests.
- Prayer goes to God and believes God is “greater than the greatest problem.” (Hawthorne)
- And immediately we learn this: **Anxiety is cured by addition not subtraction.**
 - We think anxiety will be cured if we can rid ourselves of the circumstances that seem to create our anxiety.
 - BUT that won’t work,
 - For starters, because there’s always going to be something else we can worry about! (John 16:33)
 - But more importantly, *it’s not* the subtraction of circumstantial pressure but the addition of a trustworthy God.
 - Prayer brings God into the equation.
 - “*There is an entire worldview implicit in some worry. It cries out about an ultimate aloneness. There is no one who can really help. No one can rescue. No one is really looking out for you. You are an orphan in a chaotic universe that operates according to chance. Who wouldn’t be worried given such a view of reality?*” - Ed Welch
 - But God is and God cares.
- *Anxiety is cured by addition not subtraction.*
 - When Jesus taught us to pray, what are the first words? “Our Father.” Those two words put anxiety on the run.

- In prayer, we reset our thoughts and affections. In prayer we remember the promises of God: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; . . . When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned.”
- In prayer, we remember a God who is near, a God who sent his Son to experience our sorrows and take our suffering, a God who says: “I got this! I hold the future! I have conquered your greatest enemy! (Come Easter to learn more) Trust me.”
- *Anxiety is cured by addition not subtraction.*

How do we pray...?

- **Pray by presenting requests.**
 - That’s what the word “supplication” means. God, I need some help here.
 - And here’s some good news: If it matters to you; it matters to God. There is no request to small or too great. At the hint of any anxiety, BOOM, we should pray: “Our Father, heal, move, change hearts (including this anxious one), provide for our needs, “Give us this day our daily bread.”
 - The antithesis of anxiety is faith. Faith trusts God will figure it out. Faith says (in our requests): He will take care of me, even if my greatest fears are realized or if the circumstances never change, He is enough.
 - But we also should . . .
- **Pray with thanksgiving.**
 - One pastor calls thanksgiving “WORRY’S KRYPTONITE” (Chandler).
 - Gratitude is recognizing you’ve received something at the graciousness of someone else. AND...
 - **Karl Barth said: “To begin by praising God for the fact that in *this* situation, as it is, he is so mightily God—such a beginning is the *end* of anxiety.**
 - Grateful hearts can hardly believe we enjoy the privilege of being heard by the God of the universe, much less that he cares and is working all things for good for those who love him. What have I to fear? What have I to be anxious about?

T: When we bring God in through prayer, he brings us his peace.

Verse 7

- The phrase “peace of God” is found nowhere else in the NT. (Hawthorne)
- [Peace is the presence of God amidst the pressures of life.] And God’s peace is unexplainable.
- Paul says it “surpasses all understanding,” literally, it is a peace, “which rises above every mind.”
- How amazing is it when someone sees you walking through a circumstance that should absolutely crush you, but then they realize, something is going on inside of you that they can’t see. “You have an inner strength that can’t be explained. You have an undeniable calm that baffles me.”

God’s peace “guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

- Paul uses a military word. It’s the picture of an army surrounding a city in order to provide complete protection.
- Nothing. gets. through.
- No wonder God is called our rock, our refuge, our fortress

Without the peace of God, there is no peace within.

T: When God gives us his peace, it enables us to accomplish verses 4-5.

Celebration (4) - Read v. 4

- Joy is another relentless theme throughout the letter. Public celebrations were frequent in that culture, and Paul is saying, you should consistently “celebrate [even more] exuberantly” that that!
- And this is true, even when it’s counterintuitive, because what God has done for us in Christ.

Peaceable interaction with others (5) - Read 5

- Some translations say: “considerate” or of a “gentle spirit.”
- And when we live this way, it will be obvious to those around us, and it will promote the peace among people that may not see eye to eye on every detail of life.

T: God desires our peace. God gives us peace. And...

III. God is our Peace (4:8-9).

Read 8-9

Dwelling on anxious thoughts will eat away our soul. Dwelling on godly thoughts will feed our soul.

- That’s what Paul is after when he says, “think about these things.” It is a strong word that means to drill down, to meditate, to think through, to carefully consider, “beat them into our heads.”
- We are to think on whatever is “true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent or worthy of praise.”
 - Is that your daily diet? From your every day conversations? From what you read and listen to and watch? If not, be very careful, because the flip side says...
 - Whatever is false, dishonorable, unjust, impure, unlovely, shameful, disgraceful, or worthless, *do not* think about, *do not dwell* on these things.
- As you see people’s lives who reflect those qualities, practice the same qualities... and (there’s the promise) the God of peace will be with you.
- This is so important because our thoughts form the building blocks for our actions. As God’s truth hits our minds, it through our hearts (changing what we desire and love), which in turn lead us into action.
- We must keep a close watch on what we put into our minds, and let’s also do this for our children and teach this to our children. They are growing up in a culture much, much, much more amoral and immoral than some of us would have ever dreamed.

Do you feel the weight of Paul’s words? If you think about it, every single one of these commands are impossible to keep, but not with God.

- The “whatever” of verse 8 feels impossible. “What you have learned” of verse 9 that reflects all of that - feels impossible, but God delivers the impossible.
- UNITY (AGREE IN THE LORD) Because of him - “in the Lord” (he died for his enemies)
- JOY — Rejoice always = impossible command. (REJOICE IN THE LORD) In the Lord, - the reality of Jesus brings joy, not circumstances.
- Let your reasonableness be evident (THE LORD IS NEAR)
- Don’t be anxious about anything = impossible command (but in everything BY PRAYER)

Conclusion:

How can we live all of this? How can we see our anxieties removed? How can we experience peace that is unshakeable and unexplainable? Because we know the God of Peace (9).

- Augustine once said: **“God alone is the place of peace that cannot be disturbed.”**

Do you know God in a real, vibrant, personal, anxiety alleviating kind of way? You can through Jesus.

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1) Go to him. Bring him into the equation. Today for the first time and every day. *Pray.*