

Overcoming an Anxious Mind

Philippians 4:6-7

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connect groups

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PATH

One author noted that we could write on countless American gravestones this epitaph: *Hurried, Worried, Buried*. Fear, stress, worry, and anxiety ravage modern culture. These two verses of Philippians 4 are among the most treasured by Christians worldwide because of their power to overcome this tendency to be overwhelmed by anxiety. Pastor Skip taught us how to give our souls rest by learning and practicing the truths presented:

I. The Problem: “Anxious” (v. 6)

III. The Prayer: “In everything by prayer...let your requests be made known” (v. 6)

II. The Prescription: “Be anxious for nothing” (v. 6)

IV. The Promise: “The peace of God...will guard” (v. 7)

POINTS

The Problem:

- We have a tendency to worry about perceived dangers while ignoring real ones. This problem, anxiety, is a common experience; everyone feels it in some way at some point.
- Anxiety disorders are some of the most common mental health issues in the United States, with 40 million adults suffering from them. Over the past three decades, anxiety disorders have jumped more than 1,200 percent.
- The main causes of anxiety are income for retirement, social security, healthcare, terrorism, and race relations.
- Anxiety is mentioned nineteen times in the New Testament, including by Jesus: “Do not worry about your life” (Matthew 6:25; see also Luke 12:22).
- Anxiety is a combination of two words, meaning *to divide* and *mind*. It occurs when the mind is divided between legitimate thoughts and destructive thoughts.
- **Probe:** Are you an anxious person? If so, what do you worry about most?

The Prescription:

- When it comes to mental health, these are two of the most important verses in the entire New Testament, providing a prescription. The words *for nothing* are in the present, active imperative: it’s an ongoing command.
- Paul was saying, “Stop worrying!” It sounds insensitive or impractical to do so, but with God, it’s possible.

- Jesus gave reasons not to be worried (see Matthew 6:25-26):
 - It’s unhealthy: “Is not life more than food?” Anxiety can create health disorders.
 - It’s unbecoming of a child of God (it shows lack of trust): “Your heavenly Father feeds them.”
 - It’s unproductive: “Which of you by worrying...?” According to Dr. Don Joseph Goewey, 97 percent of what we worry about is just a fearful mind punishing us with exaggerations and misperceptions.¹
- **Probe:** Discuss the last two reasons why not to worry and share about a time when you found anxiety to be unbecoming and unproductive. What were the circumstances?

The Prayer:

- The word *but* is a contrasting word and provides an antidote: replacement.
- The cure for worry is to redirect your energy and replace anxiety. The Bible calls it “casting all your care” (1 Peter 5:7). Prayer is the method of replacement.
- *Prayer* is often translated *worship* or *devotion*. So when worried, worship; when burdened, bow. Worship and worry cannot live in the same heart; they’re mutually exclusive.
- *Supplication* is strong crying out, a type of pleading and begging. When there is real need, we know how to pray.
- *With thanksgiving*: a thankful heart is a thinking heart. Think and thank: think of what God has done, and thank Him for His provisions and promise.

- *Let your requests*: not demands and tantrums, but entreaties, voicing weakness and dependence
- You aren’t informing God, but conforming to God’s will.
- **Probe:** Pray for one another, casting your cares—and worries—on the Lord.

The Promise:

- The promise is peace. There are two kinds: peace *with* God and the peace *of* God.
- The first is a fact, the second a feeling. Not every Christian has inner confidence.
- If you come to Jesus Christ, you have peace with God, but may not feel peaceful. Jesus as Savior brings peace *with* God; Jesus as Lord brings the peace *of* God.
- *Surpasses all understanding*: the peace of God transcends human intellect and analysis.
- *Guard*: a reference to a military garrison. We need to stand our ground, not letting destructive thoughts divide our mind.
- These verses are a process: we enter a situation with anxiety, but exit with peace. And between both is prayer.
- One way to remember how to respond to anxiety is this: hands up (worship and prayer), worries down. Let your concerns be His worry.
- **Probe:** What are some practical ways you can guard your mind? Here are some thoughts to consider: don’t believe everything you think, protect your mind from evil things, steep yourself in Scripture and Christian reading, and let your testimony (how you live) match your thoughts (what you think).

PRACTICE

Connect Up: How can anxiety and worry strain a relationship with God and other people? What does an anxious mind communicate about your life? How would you differentiate a worried mind from a caring heart?

Connect In: Many within the church suffer from mental illness, including extreme worry. What are some practical things the church can do to help those who suffer from mental illness? One resource suggests the following: inform yourself; dialogue, don’t debate; seek help if needed; and seek support.²

Connect Out: How can an unbeliever’s anxiety be an open door to share the gospel? For example, if someone is worried about a particular problem, offer support and encouragement. Tell him or her the solution: peace with God through Jesus that leads to the peace of God, which the world can’t give and take away.

¹ Don Joseph Goewey, “85 Percent of What We Worry About Never Happens,” August 25, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/don-joseph-goewey-/85-of-what-we-worry-about_b_8028368.html, accessed 12/10/17.

² Victoria Maxwell, “How to Help a Loved One with a Mental Illness,” September 30, 2012, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/crazy-life/201209/how-help-loved-one-mental-illness>, accessed 12/10/17.