

Anxious for Nothing

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Bible Verse: Philippians 4:6-7
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Well, whenever I step into the pulpit, I usually say something like it's a privilege to open God's word for you. I say that all the time because it's always present in my mind, the gift from God that we have to study his word together and I'm grateful to have a group of people like you that love God's word and want to hear it taught and, more than that, want to apply it to your lives and to be sanctified in the truth as our Lord prayed for his word is truth. And we have a sanctifying encouraging passage to look at here this evening at a strategic time in the life of our nation and even in the life of our church, and in many of you for your personal lives and things that you're going through. This is a wonderful, signature, foundational text for the Christian life.

Philippians 4:6-7 say this,

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.

Paul wrote this letter to a church that was facing trouble and difficulty of many different kinds. It wasn't simply a single issue difficulty that they were responding to, they had many troubles that they were trying to sort their way through, and it's understandable and it's obvious that they, Paul knew based on reports that he had received from them while he was in prison, that this was a congregation that was troubled over different things that were going on. So for example, they were facing opponents and facing persecution of different kinds that he doesn't spend much time expounding on but if you look at chapter 1, verse 27, let's say, he says, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Now why was a command like that necessary to them? He immediately states the fact in verse 28, he says, "in no way alarmed by your opponents--which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God." They were facing opposition that was a threat to them and Paul says, "Don't be alarmed by that whatsoever." And he goes on to say that the opposition and the difficulties was actually a gift from God given to them. Verse 29 he says, "For to you it has been granted for

Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Now when you remember that the Lord ordains our circumstances and everything that comes into life is filtered through his hand and has an intentional purpose in the providence of God to produce spiritual growth in you, then you can understand why Paul could say something like this with such absolute clarity and certainty. He says, "Of course you're facing opposition but, of course, you don't need to be alarmed by it. You don't need to be alarmed by what's happening in the world or in life around you because God has granted these difficulties to you for the sake of Christ. God has granted that you could suffer for the sake of Christ and that he will bless you through that. And so don't be alarmed, don't be afraid, don't shrink back in fear but rather step forward in faith and be confident and live in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ." Pretty strong words. Pretty powerful words coming to us from God's word.

So they had a problem with external affliction coming from the hands of those who hated them because they hated Christ and the gospel. There were also internal divisions as we've seen recently. If you look at chapter 2, verse 14, they had another kind of problem that was internal to the life of the body of Christ and Paul tells them, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." Chapter 4, verse 2, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." And so there was a different kind of difficulty that was taking place, an internal one of personal conflict within the body that was creating division as people chose sides between these competing women, these Christian women who were having difficulties in their personal relationship. Outside the walls of the church, there was affliction. Inside the walls of the church, there was division.

And then in a spiritual sense, there was also an influence of false teaching that was taking place. Chapter 3, verse 2, we won't rehearse all of the surrounding context of this but Paul warns them in chapter 3, verse 2, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision." There was false teaching taking place that was undermining the prior teaching of the gospel that the Apostle Paul had given to them.

And so on multiple fronts this church was afflicted by difficulties that were going on, and in our passage here today in Philippians 4:6 and 7, Paul sort of gathers all of that up and instructs them and tells them how they are to respond to it, what a cornerstone of their response is, and he tells them to be anxious for nothing. Anxious for nothing, and let's look at those two verses again and let them bookend that introduction and then we'll go through it here maybe somewhat briefly here this evening in a way that I trust will settle your hearts for whatever may be afflicting you here today.

Paul says again in chapter 4, verse 6, "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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." And so let me just kind of preface our jumping into this text with this overarching statement to you, talking to you as Christians here this evening. This text is so foundational that we could say this about it, that you and I, we need to filter our entire life through what this text has to say. This text gives us a filter by which we are to process everything that happens to us, everything that concerns us today, and everything

that might be on our mind about what could happen tomorrow. This is a prism through which everything is to be understood. It is an umbrella under which everything else falls onto that umbrella and we dwell under its protection.

"Be anxious for nothing," it says. Now the fact of the matter is that Scripture makes it plain that Christians struggle often with anxiety. You and I, we get off track, we start watching the waves around us instead of keeping our focus on Christ, and then we start to sink in the midst of it and it can be kind of difficult to find our way out of it, but what you and I need to really come to grips with and to accept and to submit our hearts and mind to is this, is that the Lord Jesus Christ himself specifically commands us not to be anxious but to instead approach life from a different kind of perspective, and we see both sides of the coin here, we see a prohibition and we see a positive injunction on how we are to live instead. And I urge you and I encourage you and I beg you and I call upon you to do this, is to set aside tonight your temptation to self-justification and to justify your anxiety because it's so difficult or, "You know, I'm just wired this way or things are really really difficult." Well, look it's been difficult for believers for 2,000 years and beyond. The early Christians in the first three centuries of the Roman Empire suffered horrible persecution. You read anything about early church history and you find that there were 10 different waves of persecution taking place under the Roman emperors for the first 300 years after the time of Christ. Bibles were burned. Christians were killed. They lost their possessions. They lost their livelihoods and, you know, there was a lot of record of church history of this. Even the apostles, the 12 apostles, church history tells us that 11 of the 12 were martyred for the faith. They died for Christ and the one who didn't die was exiled to the island of Patmos, the Apostle John, from which he wrote some of his scriptural writings. And so intense, miserable suffering has been the lot of Christians right from the beginning and Jesus said, "If they hated Me, understand that they're going to hate you. If they persecuted Me, they're going to persecute you."

So it's very vital for us if we're going to be biblical Christians and we're going to be serious about living this out individually and corporately, it's very important for us to understand and to set our expectations properly. We expect opposition, we expect ungodly governments to reign over us, we expect there to be false teaching within the church that troubles and confuses believers, it was happening right there in the day of Philippians. Beloved, this letter to the church at Philippi was written by a man who was unjustly imprisoned. And so it's just very very important for us, especially on the brink of the new era in America that's going to be introduced tomorrow, it is very very important for us to take these things to heart, to embrace them, and to set our mind accordingly and to recognize that whatever personal or social difficulties may lay ahead, that the command from Scripture has not changed and is not altered for us in any of our conditions. It's be anxious for nothing.

So with that perspective, we need to approach the text tonight and we say these things, I say these things to you not at all tonight, I trust you see and feel the fact that I'm not speaking to you in a spirit of rebuke or admonishment, but simply by way of instruction and encouragement that whatever lies ahead in your life, whatever lies ahead in our life as a church or as a nation, the Lord is with us and the Lord is able to take us through it.

He has been leading his people with exquisite perfection for millennia. He knows what to do. In fact, let's before we get to that, let's just remind ourselves of something that I believe is found in 2 Peter 2, we just need to remember who our Lord is and what he has done and what he is able to do and how much he loves us and cares for us in the process.

2 Peter 2:4 starts with a long look back at different episodes in the Old Testament. 2 Peter 2:4 and I'm just very confident that the Lord is working in our hearts as we look at his word here tonight. I'm very very confident of that. I'm very optimistic about what the future holds for all of us. 2 Peter 2:4 says this, "if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment," okay, if God can deal with disobedient supernatural beings and place them under judgment, verse 5, "and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly," he judged a wicked world and he preserved a small circle of people when he did it, verse 6, "and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot," at that same time, in other words, "oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds)." So what's happening here so far, we haven't gotten to the climax of that particular text yet, he's setting forth all of these Old Testament examples showing the power of God to judge ungodly men and to protect his people in the midst of it. The angels were judged, the ancient world was judged, but he protected Noah and his company. Sodom and Gomorrah were judged but he protected Lot in the midst of it. And while all of this vast ungodliness was taking place in the spiritual realm and in the whole realm of the world, God saw individuals by name and had them covered by the cusp of his hand so that none of it fell upon them, and he protected them and did good for them and delivered them into his kingdom in the end.

That's the point of the passage and so here in chapter 2, verse 9, he sums up the point that he's making. It's kind of a difficult text in the original language. I remember working through it and it took a while. But in verse 9 it says, "then," based on what I've said in these prior five verses, "then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment." God knows what to do with ungodly spirits, with demonic spirits. He knows what to do with an ungodly world and he knows how to protect his people. Now if we believe that, and we do, we believe that here at Truth Community Church, we rest all of our hope in that and in that alone, if we believe that, then we realize that really nothing is going to change for us no matter what comes in the world around us. The fundamental principles are still the same. God knows how to deal with ungodly people and he will do so in his time, and he also knows how to care for his chosen band. He knows how to preserve the elect. He will perfect the work that he has begun in his people until the day of Christ Jesus.

Now what that means for us is that we're not only commanded not to be anxious but we have the privilege to understand these things and to filter all of life through it. "Whatever is coming to me," you say to yourself, "the Lord has His hand upon me and I trust Him

for that. I trust Him even if everything seems contrary to it. I trust Him even though it seems like I am surrounded by a darkness that is so deep that I can feel it, and a discouragement that is so deep I can feel it. But nevertheless, I am going to trust in Him even if I have no light of my own because I have light from the Scripture that God knows how to deal with this and He is not going to abandon His people, and He is not going to be overthrown by, you know, anything that takes place in the world, in national life, in personal life."

And so, you see, we have to start there and I get questions, you know, social media, different places and all of that, I get questions, "Well, what about, you know, what about America? What about this or that? What about the Constitution?" And honestly, I don't mean to be snarky here, but honestly my attitude is, "Well, what about it? What about it? What about it?" You know, I'm not living for this country, I'm living for a country to come. I'm not at home here on earth. I'm a stranger and an exile. I'm a pilgrim passing through. And speaking as this is what believers say to themselves, my heart is set upon Christ. My heart is set upon my heavenly home. That's what I'm living for and nothing can take that away from me, and that's going to be eternity for me and I've got a short window of time here in the meantime. And when I view things in balance and in comparison of how long eternity is and the blessing there compared to the troubles of this life, you know, I just don't find a comparison that makes me want to get really wrapped up in those kinds of things. You know, I'm not setting and telling what, you know, what any other person should do and how they should spend their time, but I am saying that the Scriptures tell us not to be anxious about what happens in this world, and that everything that we respond to in life is determined by that prior first principle and you must establish that principle first. And I'm convinced, I'm convinced that there are many people, well-intentioned Christians, who get impatient with teaching like that, you know, and they say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I understand that but what about this earthly matter?" And just the impatience with the foundational biblical principle tells me that perhaps they haven't grasped yet the full significance of how wonderful and magnificent it is to be in Christ because if you grasped that, you wouldn't be so quick to move on to a matter of temporal transient circumstance.

So with those things said, we have three principles that we want to get out of the text tonight, or that the text gives us tonight might be a better way to say it. And first of all, I want you to see the prohibition against anxiety. The prohibition against anxiety. Prohibition is a negative command. Don't do this, in other words. You are prohibited from doing this. And Paul had just made this wonderful, sweet call to joy in the prior two verses that we saw on Sunday. Verses 4 and 5, he said, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near." The Lord is with us and therefore we will not fear. The Psalmist said in Psalm 23:4, I text it to a lot of you from time to time, "I fear no evil for You are with me." And so this is an Old Testament and a New Testament principle and there is no need for fear and rejoicing is possible and that's what Paul had just been emphasizing before he wrote these inspired words in verse 6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

I think I've told you in the past that when I was a very young Christian, I was memorizing some verses and all of that, I started to, at one point, I started to realign the sequence of the clauses in this verse and, you know, and I started to make that at the end the first thing about it. Let your requests be made known to God with prayer and supplication, blah, blah, blah. And you know, I stopped myself in the midst of that, I realized intuitively that something was wrong there. Here's what you need to understand is that the very sequence of the way that Paul framed these clauses is inspired by the Spirit and they have a very important context for the way that you are to pray, and that joins in with the sense of the prohibition against anxiety that we're looking at.

Look at that first clause, "Be anxious for nothing," and I'll explain more about the importance of the sequence in just a moment. After making this call to joy, he warns against a threat that would undermine it, anxiety, and "Be anxious for nothing" comes from a Greek verb that describes an uneasiness of mind or spirit. You know, there's just this turmoil and this churning inside and I don't need to tell you what anxiety is like, you have enough experience with anxiety to know exactly what Scripture is talking about, that inner turning and worrying and you can't sleep and you're, "What happens next?" And you start to overthink things. "What if this? And if that happens and then what if that happens?" And on and on it goes and just, you know, there's just an avalanche of anxious thoughts tumbling down upon you. Scripture comes and stops that avalanche and says, "Don't go there." The grammatical idea here that is not as clear in the English text is it has the idea of, "Stop being anxious. Stop being anxious." It's a negative with a present tense verb that has the idea of stop doing something, stop what you're doing and do something else instead. So, "Stop being anxious."

Now these Christians and they were believers that Paul was writing to, he calls them brethren many many times throughout the letter, and so we see that Christians can fall into this. He's not questioning their salvation, he's simply promoting their sanctification. These Christians were worried about what was happening outside the walls. They were worried about what was happening inside the walls. They were worried about these spiritual threat and that's why Paul had addressed it over and over again. But now that he's coming to the end of his letter, he's wrapping it up and he's bringing it to a capstone of what he wants their takeaway to be, you might say. Their minds were distracted by the division and the false teaching and the external threats. Their minds were distracted and they were disquieted in heart over what was going on and Paul says, "Stop being anxious. Be anxious for nothing in the midst of what you are, you know, experiencing."

Now the fact that he makes such a blanket prohibition is challenging and also encouraging; it realizes, it's like he's at the top of the mountain where the air is fresh and clean and the vision and the view is great and it's panoramic and it's just enthralling, it's like he puts his fingers in his mouth and he whistles to them. I can't do that or I would because it would be kind of cool. But you can just imagine that he's whistling to them, metaphorically speaking, whistling for them, "Hey, come up here! Come away from the fog down below there and come up here where the air is fresh and clean," spiritually speaking. He's saying, "Leave behind the anxiety and come up here to where peace is and where you are supposed to be."

Anxiety, beloved is spiritual poison. It is poison in your own heart. It is poison to your testimony. A consistently troubled and anxious believer is not a very good testimony to the prevailing power of God and the perfection of Christ and the hope of eternal life. I mean, you know, when we let that anxiety dominate us, we're saying that those things aren't important enough to lift me above earthly concerns. It's spiritual poison. And what I want to remind you of is that Jesus addressed this in the Sermon on the Mount and he used the exact same verb that Paul used here in Philippians 4.

Let's look over at Matthew 6 for a few moments. Matthew 6 and the Sermon on the Mount. You can find messages on this passage at our church website and I would invite you to do that if you haven't heard those before. This text really changed my life as a recent seminary graduate or as a seminary student, whatever the timing was, who cares. But in Matthew 6:25, Jesus says using the same kind of grammatical structure through this passage that Paul used, he says, "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Isn't there a spiritual dimension, a spiritual matter of the heart that is far more important to life than the physical conditions in which you live, Jesus says. Your soul is going to live forever. Your body in this life is transitory and your days here are fleeting. Then, you know, view life with the right perspective. And so he says in verse 25, "Do not be worried." This is the Lord Jesus Christ commanding his disciples. It doesn't get any more serious than that. And as I like to say as I've taught through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is teaching for keeps. He's not bluffing here. He's not offering life suggestions for us to take or leave as we will. No, Jesus is speaking as Lord of his people. He is telling his disciples, "This is how you are to live and how you are to be and what you are to be like inside your heart. This is to be what your inner man is like."

So you see, and here's the burden of my heart as I'm preaching these things and I've already said this, I know, beloved, that we all struggle with this to one degree or another, and I know that from sad personal experience and from, you know, a little bit of pastoral experience, I know how easily you want to justify yourself and excuse your anxiety as if it weren't a big deal or as if it were something that you can't help, and we just have to come to grips with the fact that Christ did not leave us that exit ramp from the things that he is teaching us here. He says it too many times for us to come to any other conclusion.

Look at verse 27, and I'm leaving out, I should read the whole text and if I should, then that's what I'm going to do. I'll pause here for a moment. Verse 26 he says, "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?" He says, "Just step outside and look at a bird in the tree. Do you see any bank accounts? Do you see any barns that that bird has? Does it store anything up? Your Father feeds that bird. Don't you think if you're more valuable than a bird, don't you think that God will do more for you than he'll do for a bird? If he does the lesser thing, won't he certainly do the greater thing?"

Verse 27, "who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?" You're wasting your time with this. And verse 28, "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these." If God produces flowers of magnificent beauty that grow up one day and wilt the next, what's he going to do to you with you who have an eternal soul, and you that are a child of his? What's he going to do for you by caring for you even if you don't see where the care is going to come from as you sit here at the moment? Stop looking at the things that are seen. Stop looking at external circumstances and look at the reality of Scripture and the reality of what God has been doing for millennia. He has been judging ungodly people, he has been caring for his own, he's been caring for his creation in a spectacular way. Nothing has changed. Nothing has changed and nothing is changing tomorrow. God tomorrow is going to be on his throne, God is going to be reigning over and accomplishing his purposes in his time and taking care of his people in the process.

So what is there to worry about, I ask you? I ask you? I mean, you know, we need to answer this question and come to a conviction about it and not simply have our ears tickled by somebody speaking from Scripture for, you know, for 50-60 minutes, but the responsibility for you as you hear God's word tonight is to come to convictions that shape the way you henceforth view life, and you say deep in your heart, you say, "Yes, this is true. Yes, I believe it. Yes, I will hope and put all of my trust in these things revealed in God's word. I will not trust what I see over what God has revealed in His word. I will let what God has revealed in His word shape the way that I view everything else." This is the way Christians think. This is the way that a Christian is to view all of life. It's the way the Christian mind is to operate again and again and again.

Going on, verse 30, "if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!" It's as if Jesus is saying, "What's wrong with you? Why are you agitated like this?" And so he comes back and he gives another command, "Do not worry then." Do you see it there? Put your finger on the words if you would, "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'" For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Well, I'm glad that the Lord made his point clear, aren't you? And he said everything that needed to be said at that point there in verse 33 to forbid us from worry and to give us every reason not to have to be worried.

Now wait, verse 34 he says it one more time, "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Apparently what he had said through verse 33 wasn't enough, he needed to say it one more time. And as you go through that passage, the force of the verb tenses in the original language has this, it's like this collectively, he's saying, "Stop being anxious and don't ever start again." And you know, the Sermon on the Mount is one of the most famous discourses of Jesus' teaching saved for us in the gospel writers, and in the Sermon on the Mount, there is more tension to anxiety, Jesus gives more attention to the matter of anxiety than any other

topic in everything that he covers in that magnificent sermon. The topic of prayer is a close parallel in terms of the length that he spent on it. So just by the repetition, by the examples and illustrations that he gives, the repeated admonitions, the force of the context, we see that this is a matter of great concern to God that his people live this way and be anxious for nothing.

So beloved, when you start to come to grips with these things, it does settle your heart. It doesn't happen overnight. This is something that you have to rehearse in your mind again and again and again as new challenges come up. You need to say, "Oh, no, let me go back to Matthew 6. Let me go back to Philippians 4. Let me remember this again what our Lord said." But beloved, there's no way to avoid this. To see this teaching in Scripture and then to consciously yield to anxiety is disobedience to God. To put it another way, it is sinful. It is wrong. It is a moral failure to live with an anxious heart in light of the Scriptures that teach us so much to the contrary. Anxiety is a symptom of someone who is not trusting God. There's no way around that.

Now the good news, the good news for us as a sinful people is that we have a Savior who loves us, a Savior who has taken on human flesh and has lived amongst us and he knows something about the human condition. And we have a Savior who's died for our sins at the cross of Calvary. We have a Savior who's paid the price of all of our sin with his shed blood and he's covered us with his righteousness. And so we can go to him and confess our anxious weakness. We can go to him and ask for forgiveness and ask for help, and know that he is very eager to grant that and to help us with this, and that we can't do this on our own strength. The point for tonight is not that it's an unforgivable sin because it's not, the point for tonight is that we are not to accept that as the condition in which our heart lives. We are to declare war on this sin in our lives and put it to death.

So the question then becomes, "Well, how do we do that? How is it that I, you say that I'm not supposed to be anxious. Okay, I agree with that but what do I do instead?" You know, you need to put off something and put something else on, replace anxiety with trust. How do we do that? And that brings us to our second point here tonight as Paul gives us his promotion of prayer. His promotion of prayer. We've seen the prohibition against anxiety and paralleled in Matthew 6, now we see the promotion of prayer and as a parallel text here, I could read all 150 Psalms but that's not going to work at all. I'm not saying I should do that because I know that that's impossible for tonight.

The promotion of prayer. What is the alternative to anxiety or better stated, what is the answer to anxiety for the Christian, the Christian man, the Christian woman living through difficult circumstances? What is the answer? And Paul shows us what the answer is, it is trusting, thankful prayer. Trusting, thankful prayer and notice what I said and notice how that was phrased. The answer to anxiety is not simply prayer. That sounds like a strange thing for a pastor to say from a Christian pulpit, doesn't it, to say that the answer to anxiety is not prayer, not prayer and I'll, you know, just to help you understand what I mean, you know, there is this type of prayer that we've all done in times in the past and we just, you know, it's just an utter cry of desperation, "God, help me! Get me out of this! In Jesus' name. Amen." You know, and you don't feel, you know, you don't sense

any kind of relief in your heart as a result of having prayed in that way and the reason is that you've not prayed in a proper way. You haven't prayed as Scripture tells us to pray. You know, there's a prayer that has no trust, no love, no thanksgiving involved in it, and it's simply a completely earthbound crying out with an utter forgetfulness of who God is and who Christ is. No, the answer to anxiety is not prayer like that, the answer to anxiety takes some more spiritual work. It's trusting prayer. It's thankful prayer.

Look at chapter 4, verse 6, and this is why my young efforts to rearrange the text as if the Holy Spirit needed a little help in how he had arranged the words of God, was so misguided on my part. He says, "Be anxious for nothing, but," so the contrast. We must understand that there's a contrast between our anxious ways and what follows and we're to put aside, put off that first clause of anxiety and replace it with what comes in the rest of the verse. It's really not that difficult to see or to interpret. He says, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." He gives us four different nouns there, one of the nouns embedded in a verbal form, that give us the sense of what we are to do. Prayer in everything but prayer and supplication; thirdly, thanksgiving; and fourthly, let your requests be made known to God.

You are to replace anxious care in your heart with trust and everything, just, you know, noticing that in passing, when he says "in everything," he's indicating that this is a comprehensive way of living. This is a comprehensive view of life. And it is wonderfully encouraging to see and to understand this. When Scripture tells us that in everything we are to do this, it means something great and magnificent for the Christian heart. And even if you are a young Christian, just kind of taking your first steps as, you know, as a Christian believer, this is as true for you as it is for the most seasoned saint in the room. This is the birthright of every Christian and it's not reserved for the spiritually mature, this is what everyone, this is what God has made available to all of his children. It's wonderful. Everything tells us that this is a comprehensive view of life, and what it means is this, is that there is no challenge, there is no difficulty that is too great for the power of God. There is no earthly circumstances, no earthly opponent, there is no social structures that are so overwhelming that we can't go to God and rest it in his hands and know that he has sovereign power over all of it. You know, I mean, I lived through the fall of communism in the late '80s. I saw that. It seemed impossible just a few short years earlier and then you're watching live TV broadcasts of the Berlin Wall being torn down. God sovereignly overturning nations right before your very eyes. He does this. He can do it.

So there is nothing in your life that is too great for the power of God, and conversely, there is nothing that is too small to be outside the realm of his care. You say, "Aw, you know, this is just my individual life and, you know, I'm concerned about this and all of that," and to just understand that the call of God says whether it's a seemingly small matter or whether it's a great matter, all of that is the subject of this invitation to come to God in believing, trusting, thankful prayer. Everything. And so every concern that is on your heart tonight is a proper subject matter for this kind of thankful, trusting prayer that Paul describes.

Now with that said, Paul does not immediately start and then immediately say, "In everything pray to God." No, he doesn't do that. He filters it through an entire attitude, an entire cultivation of believing faith in the God to whom you pray that shapes everything else. And so he conditions the attitude with which we pray and we're going to talk about these terms in just a moment. I just want you to see them again. He conditions our attitude by saying it's to be done by prayer.

Look at it there in verse 6. Prayer. Supplication. Thanksgiving. Your requests that are to be made known to God. Now the word "prayer," the idea of that is to address God personally. If you are a Christian, he is your heavenly Father. And going back to Matthew 6 and, you know, Paul wrote after the teaching of Jesus and there are just strong echoes of the teaching of Christ in what Paul is saying here. Prayer is a matter of addressing God personally as your heavenly Father. In Matthew 6:9, look at what Christ said is to be the pattern for our prayer. He says, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven,' addressing him personally, addressing him as the one who has a paternal care for Christians, this Father who is in heaven who dwells in glorious power is the one who loves us and cares for us. Address him like that and immediately, immediately the cry of desperation, you know, "God, if You're up there, then I'm asking You to do this." Well, you know, what this teaching does is it banishes that conditional statement. "God, if You're up there, God, if You're listening to me." No, this is not how Christians pray at all. Just, you know, let's just not pray that way, shall we? No, we come, we enter into his presence as Ephesians 3:12 says, we come to him with bold and confident access. "God, I know, I know that You hear me. I know that You love me because why else would Christ have been on that cross suffering for my sins except for Your infinite love for me? I know that You love me. I know that You're my Father and so I know that You hear me as I pray now and I'm addressing you as my heavenly Father, as my God."

And you see, you address God and when Paul says by prayer, it has this idea, you address him by faith and you consider him as someone who is near, that he is with you and he is with you always, and there is this great intimacy in a believer in his private prayer whether he's on his knees or some other physical posture, there is this conscious awareness based on the revelation of God in Scripture and the testimony of the Spirit in our hearts that God is with me, that in Christ I know that God is for me. And so I have the privilege of appealing to an omnipotent God who loves me and he has called me to make my, in the language of the hymns, to make my wants and wishes known. Do you see how different it is from these unbelieving cries of desperation? No conditions, "God, if You hear me." No, we don't pray to him that way. He said he hears us and so we pray in response to that.

Now supplication, by prayer and supplication, the idea that we're making a request that God would meet a need. The idea here, the spiritual virtue, the spiritual quality here is one of great importance. This idea is expressing dependence. It is a humble expression of dependence upon God in contrast with the self-reliant spirit of our age. You know, there's no spirit in the words of the old Frank Sinatra anthem, "I did it my way." Self-reliance, self-boasting and all of that. You know, I can do it myself. No, the believer praying in a Philippians 4 kind of way is coming and saying, "Lord, I need Your help. I come asking

for help. This is beyond my ability. This is over-burdening my heart. God, I need Your help."

And at that point as you're letting that out and expressing your heart in that way, you know, and knowing some of the heartache that some of you are going through, it wouldn't surprise me a bit that at that point is when the tears just start to burst forth and to just cry out. I can remember times like that in the past in my own life, and I knelt down and I'm not going to get emotional here remembering it, but I can remember kneeling down in great grief and sorrow and I just said, "O God!" And I just burst into sobs and sobs and crying and I couldn't even say anything else. And you know, just the brokenness of that moment and the overwhelming circumstances that I was in, and the grief that was animating my heart, you know, and sometimes, sometimes tears are the language of prayer. Sometimes tears are the way that we express this dependence and we express the forsaking of our own self-reliance. And you know, the Psalmist said, "God, You've taken account of my tears. You've kept them in a bottle." God knows those tears and he views them sympathetically.

So you know, and supplication is just this sense of expressing that dependence and sometimes it's a very broken dependence that we're praying and the spirit in which we're praying. You see, and here's the thing that I want you to see at this point, beloved, is that this kind of prayer that we're talking about that displaces anxiety with trust, this is not the attitude of a boastful man or woman who's got it all under control. That's not the attitude. God despises that attitude, that he's opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Well, you know, what's more humbling than saying, "God, this is beyond my ability. I don't know what to do. I need wisdom. I need help. I need Your comfort." You get a sense here of the majesty of the love of God for his children that he invites that kind of interaction with him. There's a marvel here, the marvel is not that God is that great and loving, although that's an infinite marvel, the human marvel, humanly speaking, is that we don't avail ourselves of this like we could, you know, and that, you know, and that we, you know, we tend to, we're tempted toward a despising of the time that it takes to really enter into the spirit of this prayer. It's a great loss. It's a great loss that we live with that attitude.

So Paul, going back to verse 6 there, by prayer, addressing God personally, supplication, humble dependence, with thanksgiving, expressing gratitude. I don't need to explain this to you. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "in everything," there it is again, "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." And so even in the midst of expressing our dependence and feeling our weakness, we are mindful and we all to mind the blessing of God and we thank him for it. Look, my Christian friend, God has blessed you in the past, hasn't he? If you are a Christian, he has blessed you supremely in giving you new life in Christ. Now think about all of the many times that God has delivered you and answered prayer and given you unexpected blessings, all of that goodness in the past, all of the things that he has said in Scripture, giving us a perfect word that we can study and find satisfaction and strength for our souls. All of the blessings in Christ, forgiveness of sin at the cross, the blessings of his righteousness imputed to those who believe, the forgiveness of sin, the cleansing work of the Spirit, the indwelling of the Spirit, the

sanctifying work of the Spirit. On and on it goes. He's blessed us in the past. He promises to protect us in this life, to work everything for good to those who love him. He promises to carry us into heaven when we die or when Christ returns. You know, he said, "I go to prepare a place for you. If I go to prepare a place for you, I'm going to come again so that where I am, you may be with Me also."

Now and I'm just, you know, I'm ashamed of the thumbnail version I'm giving of our grounds for thanks. I hope the Lord and I know that the Lord will be gracious for my utter inadequacy as I say these things to you. But beloved, don't you see you've been blessed greatly in the past and if everything is bad today, you're still under the hand of God's protection and he's going to turn it for good in the end, and in the future you will enter into the presence of Christ and you'll see him face-to-face, one day to have a resurrected body that will be assaulted by sin and sorrow no more. And it will be like that for ages of ages of ages forever without end. Amen.

Now don't you think that somewhere in the past, somewhere in the present, somewhere in eternity future you can find some grounds to give some heartfelt thanks to God no matter what is happening in life right now? Don't you see, beloved, how an atmosphere of trust in your heavenly Father, dependence upon his care, and gratitude for the immense innumerable blessings he gives frames the way that we're to pray? It should make us draw back from coming into prayer with a complaining or an untrusting attitude. We need to remember these things first before we start asking for things. Remember who you're talking to, your heavenly Father who rules over all. Remember the love that he has shown you in Christ and in Scripture and in the Spirit and the blessings that he has given. The reality is, the reality is that if we would take this aspect of approaching God seriously, the reality is that our expressions of anxiety would shrivel because our hearts would be so filled with, metaphorically speaking, Shekinah glory at the goodness and greatness and grace of God. "What was it I came here to talk to You about, God? I can't even remember what it was. I'm just so overwhelmed by Your goodness and how magnificent You are, and the kindness and the mercy that You've showered upon me in the Lord Jesus Christ. God, amen. I forgot what it was I wanted to talk about."

And so, you see, beloved, what Paul is teaching us here is a whole dimension of what faith looks like and living and walking by faith. Biblical prayer is not a laundry list of wants and complaints about physical matters. Biblical prayer is about more than the latest medical issues that Aunt Flo has. There's this whole dimension of recognizing the glory of God, honoring him for who he is, and trusting him and thanking him in prayer that is the spirit of the real thing. You know, I've preached a message on this why do we pray if God knows everything? It should start to become obvious to you that we do not pray in order to give God information that he doesn't have. "I didn't know that!" It's not like that. He knows everything. We've been reading Psalm 139 to open our Tuesday night services this month, he knows what's on our lips before we've spoken a word of it. And so we're not giving him information, the purpose of prayer is this, it is the means that he has given to us as Christians to align our heart with trusting him and to verbalize and to express the faith that he first implanted in us in seed form by regeneration from the Holy Spirit.

When that attitude of prayer is promoted in your life, then, then you can make your requests known to God.

Look at verse 6, he says, "with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." "God, now that I'm thinking rightly about You, now that I've remember You and Your blessings, here's what I have to say." And so you share your burdens with God, you express your heart to him and what we should see from this passage, what you should see from this is that you have a precious privilege of intimacy with the God of the universe that Christ procured for you with his life, death and resurrection. The command here is gentle from Paul. He's writing it to brethren whom he loved but, my friends, it is a command. It is an imperative in the original language. Our heavenly Father requires this dependence from us and we're to cultivate it in obedience to his word.

Well, what is the result of that sanctified approach to prayer which is really a sanctified approach to life, this is about everything, remember, verse 6, and the verbs are in the present tense indicating that this is an ongoing matter, it's not a one-time, one-off event, this is the way that we live, this is the way that we pray continually again and again and again. And you know, sometimes we stumble and we fail and we come back and start over, but what's the result of this? Third point tonight is the promise of peace. The promise of peace. The believer who lives like this as the habit of his life, the continuance of this kind of prayer marking his approach to life, and by now I would hope that somewhere in your heart is this eager desire to say, "I want to start living more this way. I want to know what that is like. This is who my God is and I want to honor Him like this. Forget the world that I'm just passing through, I'm not seeking my country here, I'm seeking a country to come. I'm seeking a heavenly country and there is nothing that prohibits me from doing this. There's nothing that the next administration can do to stop this from happening in my life and in my heart. I get to obey God like this. Let me at it."

And the promise that comes with this, verse 7, you're familiar with the verse, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." This verse gives a promise of peace to the believer who approaches God like this in an ever-growing manner. The peace is a sense of well-being that God gives to our mind. Instead of the prior anxiety and turmoil, we come to an inner calm and a tranquility that looks with satisfaction upon our foes, that looks with satisfaction on the trials of life and says, "You know, I don't know how and let me get the tears off my cheeks as I say this but I know that somehow the Lord is going to sustain me through this and He is going to prove Himself faithful to me. I know that and I'm at rest in that regardless of what's happening outside of me."

There's something that this peace is and something that it does, as Paul expresses it. He says, "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension." This is what it is, it's something that is beyond our ability to understand. It's an inward peace of soul grounded in God's presence and promise to us. It is a state of mind that goes beyond human understanding. It surpasses all comprehension. That's what it is. Then it does something also, it guards us, it protects us.

Look at it there in verse 7, it "will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." The idea is that this peace acts like a supernatural fortress to your heart. As you cultivate this kind of approach to God as the consistent way that you live, he promises that his peace will guard your heart from these external assaults. In the context of what Paul was saying to the Philippians, this peace will protect you from the concern about the external opponents. It will protect you and help cultivate unity within the divisions that you're now experiencing. It will protect you from the false teachers that are out to diminish your faith. So beloved, it protects us from fear in the midst of the seasons of life that come and go.

Heart and mind, look at it there again in verse 7, it "will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus," your thoughts, your feelings, your will, your volition, in other words. Paul here is giving a comprehensive description of the inner man, that unshakable and unshakable sense of well-being replaces that prior cancer of anxiety. This is a biblical expectation of how we are to live and how we are to be. It is available to every believer who will approach God in this manner, who will humble themselves and take the time to seek him and to seek his kingdom. That's what Jesus said in verse 33 of Matthew 6, isn't it? "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness," seek it first as the utter highest priority of your heart, "and all these things will be added to you." It's like this passage in Philippians is a commentary on the prior words of Christ.

So look at that last clause there in verse 7, it says, it'll "guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." That's the realm of peace. It is not that God changes circumstances in the way that we dictate to him. That's not the realm in which things get better because sometimes the circumstances get worse. The realm is this unshakable kingdom, this immovable, impeccable, immutable Christ who never changes. This is the realm of our peace and comfort. In Christ Jesus, you have this peace and in that little brief three word phrase, he's captured the essence of the entire letter, that Christ who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. That's the realm of this, that Christ humbled himself to obedience, even to death on a cross, and God highly exalted him so that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, that it is not my righteousness that I rely on but the righteousness of God which comes through faith in Christ Jesus, and that there is a promise of the resurrection from the dead, and that he will transform our bodies, he will come back and he will transform our bodies by the power that he has to exert and to submit everything to his own will. That's what it means when he says "in Christ Jesus." He's been talking about Christ throughout the whole letter.

So in this realm of salvation and the perfection and the perseverance of the saints and the exaltation of Christ and his promise to his people to come again, our citizenship in heaven, Christ coming from there for us, that's the realm, that's what it means "in Christ Jesus." When that's filling your mind and you've been responding to God in the way that we've been talking about here tonight, beloved, don't you see there could be no other outcome than an unshakable peace that come what may, whatever you look upon, whatever you look upon in life, I have a mental image, a sorrowful mental image in my

mind, whatever you look upon in life, you can step back and sing, "It is well with my soul."

And so, yes, beloved, in light of all of these things that we've seen tonight, that's why Paul says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God, and that infinite peace will indeed guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Let us pray.

Our dearest Lord, our magnificent Savior, our wondrous Lord, Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Counselor, brother and friend, how we love You and worship and honor You here tonight and Your glory and Your presence with us is more than 10,000 nations and 10,000 Constitutions. O dear Christ, we love You supremely and we rest in You and we want nothing else beside. Make Yourself glorious in our hearts and in our minds. Make Yourself glorious in our speech with one another. Help us to approach the throne in just such a way as this as Paul has made clear through Your word tonight.

And as we respond to You in the days to come, O God, may the words of Christ be fulfilled in us. When he said in John 14:27, "eace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." My Father, I pray that for these dear people in front of me, these dear brothers and sisters in Christ, some suffering under such discouraging circumstances, I pray that even if you don't change the circumstances, that You would lead them into this unconquerable peace that is promised to those who love You and who respond in this kind of faith.

And Father, for those that find all of this foreign to them, I pray that by Your Spirit You would lead them to Christ in saving faith, a repentant faith for the very first time, that You would give them new life that would enable them to respond in faith and to enter into this wondrous life that You've given to Your people. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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