

Philippians 4
Part 1
Joy in spite of worry

Philippians 4:1-9 Amplified Bible

'¹THEREFORE, MY brethren, whom I love and yearn to see, my delight and crown (wreath of victory), thus stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. ²I entreat and advise Euodia and I entreat and advise Syntyche to agree and to work in harmony in the Lord. ³And I exhort you too, [my] genuine yokefellow, help these [two women to keep on cooperating], for they have toiled along with me in [the spreading of] the good news (the Gospel), as have Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the Book of Life. ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always [delight, gladden yourselves in Him]; again I say, Rejoice! ⁵Let all men know and perceive and recognize your unselfishness (your considerateness, your forbearing spirit). The Lord is near [He is coming soon]. ⁶Do not fret or have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance and in everything, by prayer and petition (definite requests), with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God. ⁷And God's peace [shall be yours, that tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and being content with its earthly lot of whatever sort that is, that peace] which transcends all understanding shall garrison and mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸For the rest, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of reverence and is honourable and seemly, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely and lovable, whatever is kind and winsome and gracious, if there is any virtue and excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think on and weigh and take account of these things [fix your minds on them]. ⁹Practice what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and model your way of living on it, and the God of peace (of untroubled, undisturbed well-being) will be with you.'

If anybody had an excuse for worry or anxiety, it was Paul. His Christian friends at Philippi were disagreeing with one another, he had to face divisions among the believers at Rome and he was waiting for a decision about his very life.

Paul had a good excuse to worry, but he did not, instead he takes time to explain to us the secret of overcoming worry; the Greek word in verse 6 which is translated 'anxiety' or 'anxious' means to be pulled in different directions. Hope will pull our mind in one direction and fear pulls us in another – the result is we are pulled apart.

The root of our English word worry is 'to strangle' and Webster's dictionary defines it as 'to seize by the throat with teeth and shake or mangle as one animal does another, or to harass by repeated biting and snapping' as of a dog worrying sheep.

If you are subject to worry, you will know that physically it does seem as though it is strangling or grabbing you by the throat. Worry does have very definite physical consequences, headaches, neck pains, ulcers and even back pain. Worry affects our thinking, digestion and in some circumstances co-ordination. Worry in short, is torment, and fear, as we know, has torment.

1 John 4:18 New King James Version

'¹⁸There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.'

Anxiety and worry are attacks on the mind in order to distract. There are certain things that we as believers are instructed to do with our minds, and worry isn't one of them.

Worry from a spiritual point of view is wrong thinking. Where your mind goes, your feelings will quickly follow, from a fretful thought you will find yourself feeling worried and anxious. Worry is the greatest robber of all of joy and it is not enough to tell ourselves to stop worrying because that kind of action doesn't catch the thief.

It is absolutely impossible to live in peace and worry at the same time. We have to cultivate peace, and we do it by choosing it over and above whatever is worrying us. It is a process, as we abide in the place God has put us, in Christ, we will learn to receive His peace in any and every situation. In face, we will learn to **contend** for our peace - *'It's my peace and I'm having it!'*

Jesus told us that He was leaving His peace with us –

John 14:27 NIV

'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'

So, worry is an inside job and it can have very real outward manifestations, anything from skin complaints to asthma and it takes more than good intentions to get the victory over it. The antidote to worry is a secure mind, a mind that is in a fixed position, unwavering trust in the goodness, kindness and mercy of our God. When you have a secure mind, then you will conquer worry.

If we are to experience a secure mind, we need certain things –

- Focussed prayer
- Focussed thoughts
- Focussed lifestyle

Let's examine focussed prayer first.

1. Focussed prayer -

Philippians 4:6-7

Paul does not write 'pray about it', he uses three different words to describe prayer.

(a) Prayer

(b) Petition (or supplication) and

(c) Thanksgiving

Focussed prayer involves all these things.

(a) Prayer

The word 'prayer' is a general word for making our requests known to God – the dictionary describes it as -

'A spoken or unspoken address to God, it may express praise, thanksgiving, confession or a request for something such as help or somebody's wellbeing.'

It has the idea of adoration, devotion and worship as well as expressing our needs. If we find ourselves worrying, our *first* action should be to worship God, to rejoice and to thank Him that He already knows our problem. Because where there is a problem, provision is right next to it. Our confidence is in -

Hebrews 13:5 Amplified Bible

'⁵Let your character or moral disposition be free from love of money [including greed, avarice, lust, and craving for earthly possessions] and be satisfied with your present [circumstances and with what you have]; for He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]'

As we declare into our circumstances our confidence in the greatness, majesty and **willingness** of God to assist us, we are grateful and thankful that God is with us and is big enough to solve our problems and our faith rises.

We are confident that He is not only **with** us, but wants to be something **to** us in the situation – He is always seeking our increase. So in whatever situation you find yourself, God will be right there, wanting to be something for you – maybe you are in a situation right now, if so, just stop and ask Him what He wants to **be** for you in this.

'I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]' Emphasis added.

So the first step is focussed worship and rejoicing - getting God **between** us and our problem, not seeing God through the problem.

The second step is supplication or petition.

(b) Supplication or petition

Supplication is sharing our needs and problems – this is the way Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane -

Hebrews 5:7

This scripture is best read in the Amplified version – where it shows that supplication is not a matter of carnal energy, but carries the import of *spiritual* intensity.

And the third step is appreciation or thanksgiving.

(c) Appreciation or thanksgiving –

Ephesians 5:20

Colossians 3:15-17

Our Father always enjoys hearing His children say ‘thank You’ – developing an attitude of gratitude is so important as we walk in sweet communion with the Lord. We are so eager to ask and so slow to appreciate all God’s goodness towards us. When Jesus healed the ten lepers only one came back to thank Him – and he was a Samaritan - which drew Jesus surprise.

Luke 17:11-19

Focussed prayer depends on the right kind of mind, the single, focussed mind, the submissive mind and the spiritual mind; this is why Paul’s prescription for peace is found at the end of Philippians and not at the beginning.

In chapter one we saw we needed the single mind.

In chapter two, we discovered we needed the submissive mind.

In chapter three the spiritual mind.

If we have these we will have the secure mind and show our appreciation to God in all circumstances. In other words we must practice chapters one through three if we are to reach chapter four and the security of mind which Paul talks about here.

Paul is encouraging us to take everything to God in prayer, he is exhorting us not to worry about anything, but to pray about everything.

Proverbs 3:5, 6

Says the same thing. We are inclined to pray about big things but think that we can manage the small things in our lives, but God says He wants to be consulted in everything – in all our ways, all our doings, let Him in on what we are doing.

Proverbs 16:3 The Message

‘Put God in charge of your work, then what you’ve planned will take place.’

Talk to God about everything that concerns you, it is the first step towards overcoming anxiety and worry –

1 Peter 5:7 NIV

'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.'

The result will be that the peace of God will guard, or garrison, your heart and mind.

Romans 5:1

We have peace with God. Of course the peace of God does not mean that we don't have any trials – we have to have the trials in order to work the peace in us. Without them, it would be easy to have peace. Jesus himself said *'in this world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world'* John 16:33. Trials are about our ability to overcome them and find peace within situations which are far from peaceful. This is Paul's message to us, peace is there, it is yours, rest in it, God is absolutely taking care of everything.

The peace of God means a quiet inner confidence regardless of circumstances, people, things or worry.

We have a lovely Old Testament example of this found in –

Daniel 6

And we find Daniel in the den of lions. When the King proclaimed that his subjects were to pray to no-one but himself Daniel prayed as usual –

Daniel 6:10-11

Perfect peace in the midst of extreme difficulty, and it was as a result of his perfect peace that Daniel spent a quiet night in the lion's den.

The King however, had no such peace.

Daniel 6:18

So we see that the first condition for a secure mind and overcoming worry is focussed prayer.

2. Focussed thinking:

Philippians 4:8

Peace involved our heart and our mind.

Isaiah 26:3

Wrong thinking leads to wrong feeling and before long the heart and mind are pulled apart and we are strangled by worry. We must recognise that thoughts are real and powerful even though they

cannot be seen, weighed or measured. There is great power in our thoughts. What we must do about our thoughts is clearly seen in –

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 New Living Translation

‘⁴We use God’s mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. ⁵ We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.’

Paul spells out in detail the things we should think about as Christians –

Philippians 4:8-9 The Message

‘⁸⁻⁹Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.’

It is thought likely that only about 8% of the things that people worry about are legitimate matters of concern, the other 92% are either imaginary, never happen or involve things over which we have no control.

Proverbs 4:23

Above all things we must guard our hearts for out of it the word tells us, is the wellspring of life.

Proverbs 16:22

It is essential that we allow the Holy Spirit to control our minds through the truth of the word of God. It is the consistent study and meditation upon the scriptures that will transform our thinking –

Romans 12:1-2 Amplified Bible

‘¹I APPEAL to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship.

²Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you].’

The old adage, rubbish in, rubbish out, still holds very true, particularly in this present age where our senses are bombarded with information, which is less than helpful, 24 hours day.

Ephesians 4:17-24

It is in the area of the mind that we are constantly under attack and no Christian can afford to waste good thinking time on thoughts that do not edify them.

Ephesians 5:15 – 17 New King James Version

Walk in Wisdom – see things from God’s perspective

‘¹⁵ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.’

As you fill your mind with thoughts of the good things in God’s word, and develop your relationship with the Holy Spirit, you will develop a **secure** mind which will arrest negative thoughts and anything which would seek to deceive you or divert you from God’s purposes for your life.

Psalm 119:165

Crucial to our growth is the renewing of the mind without which there can be no possibility of transformation. Every one of us has mindsets, including the Sovereign Lord. If we are to have the mind of Christ we must develop the practice of thinking again, thinking beyond where we currently are and thinking, especially from the inner man of the heart. Renewed thinking is essentially spiritual. We are renewed in the **spirit** of our mind.

3. Focussed living:

Philippians 4:9

Our actions are a result of our attitudes. You are not what you think you are, but what you think – you are. How we think is so very important to how we live. Our thought life is not a secret from the Lord and he tells us to be transformed by the renewal of our minds – He doesn’t like a lot of what goes on there!

Sin always results in unrest – did you know you could sin with your mind? Purity results from peace.

Isaiah 32:17 Amplified Bible

‘¹⁷And the effect of righteousness will be peace [internal and external], and the result of righteousness will be quietness and confident trust forever.’

Right living, or righteous living – we would perhaps term it clean living – will result in peace, both internal and external and not only that, quietness and confident trust will be your portion. You

cannot afford in these days of increased tension and activity, not to take up that position of peace, and pay the cost to obtain it, right or focussed living.

Take a few moments right now to assess where you are before God.

Are you focussed in your prayer life, your thinking and your lifestyle?

Are there any changes to your schedule that the Holy Spirit would like you to make in order to make more room and time for you to develop your relationship with Him? Take a break here and talk to Him about it.

Focussed living is a necessary condition for experiencing the peace of God which passes understanding. Paul gives us four activities under the heading of 'focussed living' –

Philippians 4:9 NIV

*⁹ Whatever you have **learned** or **received** or **heard** from me, or **seen** in me— put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.'*

- Learned
- Received
- Heard
- Seen

It is one thing to learn a truth, but it is totally something else to receive it and make it part of your life. David the great psalmist knew this –

Psalm 51:6

James 1:22

Focussed praying, focussed thinking and focussed living are the keys to a secure mind and total victory over worry, anxiety and fear. There is no middle ground in our mind, we either have a focussed mind whose default position is peace, or we allow ourselves to think the way the world thinks and are pulled apart and strangled by worry and such like.

Matthew 6:24-34

Meditate, think deeply upon this passage of scripture and be at peace.

