

When you're anxious, pray, and when you pray, there'll be peace

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[0 : 00] Our reading is from the book of Philippians chapter 4 and it's on page 1180.

Philippians chapter 4 beginning at verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice.

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

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.

[1 : 26] This is the word of the Lord. Thank you very much, Ruth, for reading that.

Hi, I'm Robbie. It's nice to meet you all. As Alan said, I'm the youth pastor in training and we're here in our all-age service. Normally our kids and our youth would go out and they'd have age-specific teaching. But every now and then we like to stay all together in one big service because we believe that the Bible is there for all ages and all ages can understand it.

And we can teach it in a way that everyone can understand all together. So, boys and girls, if you would like to come down the front, I would love to have some more company down here. The adults have this habit of sitting five rows back.

So, well done to the people who are right at the front. But there's a big gap. So, I'd love, if boys and girls are here, do come down. Don't feel pressure if you're not. Oh, Owen's here. Brilliant. Everyone else can come join if you're here. Don't worry.

I might need your help later on as well. So, this morning we're starting a new series. Over summer we're looking at some summer snapshots of the Bible where we look at just a couple of verses and dig into what they mean and reflect on them.

[2 : 32] And today, as we've heard, we're reading from Philippians. Specifically, chapter 4, verses 6 and 7. We're thinking about, boys and girls, things that make us nervous.

Things that make us anxious. Maybe you've all heard about the kind of huge wave of stress and anxiety that's covering the whole world. Everybody is stressed and nervous.

Well, our verses from Philippians today are going to help us figure out how should we deal with anxiety. What do we do when we encounter something that makes us nervous? Everyone gets stressed and anxious at some point.

Often we hear about anxiety. It's a sense of unease or a constant state of nervousness. Sometimes we feel anxious or stressed because something big is coming up.

Maybe we've got a big sports game. Maybe we've got a school show we're nervous about. Maybe there's a big project at work. Those things can make us anxious until the event happens.

[3 : 31] Other times we can feel anxious or stressed for a really long period of time about something that we're not necessarily certain about. Maybe you're a parent and you feel anxious about raising your child to be a friend of Jesus.

Maybe you're really anxious when you go to school because you're not sure if people are really your friends or they like you that much. Or you feel you don't fit in. That might make you anxious for a long period of time. There's tons of stuff that can make us anxious.

Often we can get anxious about our health or our family members' health if somebody gets sick. Or we get worried about employment, jobs, flats, all these things. They can all make us anxious.

Well, Philippians chapter 4 verses 6 and 7 has something to say to us about how we handle anxiety. Paul gives us a way to reduce our anxiety or maybe even get rid of it completely. So we're going to look at what he tells us to do and we're going to look at the kind of peace he tells us about.

One important thing just before we dig right in. Paul isn't talking about clinical anxiety or kind of these more broader, more serious mental health issues.

[4 : 37] So please, if you're struggling with that, don't think that today might immediately solve those things. These things can be done on top of seeing your GP and getting other help. These things do not contradict each other.

We can use them both. But today, Paul is telling us about our general anxieties that everybody might get. When we get anxious, we struggle to operate well. We get nervous.

Our hearts beat faster. Our hands shake. We can't concentrate. Often we just try and press onwards, deal with it ourself, and cope as best as we can with what's going on around us.

Hoping that one day it will just get better. Well, that's not a very good way to deal with anxiety. And even better is that Paul, who's writing this letter, has a better way to help.

He's writing this letter from Rome. He's actually in prison. He's in chains. He doesn't know what's going to happen to him. Paul has plenty big reasons to be anxious about his life.

[5 : 34] So when he suggests something, I think we should listen to him because he knows what it looks like to be anxious. Paul tells us that when we are anxious, boys and girls, the one thing we are meant to do is present our requests to God.

We have to ask God for help. But how? How does praying really help us when we're anxious? How does it make us feel less nervous and scared?

Well, it's helpful to think about all of our worries like a backpack. A backpack. Like this. Like this one on my back. I'm wearing one. A big backpack. We're all wearing one.

Everyone. You might not see it. Yours is invisible. But it's filled with all the things you are worried and stressed about. And we all carry it with us all the time. And the more we put in our backpack, the heavier it gets.

And the harder it is to stand and give a talk in front of a church. The harder it is to just do normal life. Everything. All of our stresses and worries. We keep putting them in our backpack.

[6 : 32] And until it feels they're so heavy, we can barely even lift it. Now we can try and just carry ourselves, you know, hold up by force of will, just trying to get stronger. Trying to get better at dealing with it.

Well, the other option is that Paul says we can just, we can pray to God about it. Now the thing about when we pray to God about things we're worried about, what we do is we hand them over to God.

So, oh, finally going to take this bag off. See, my bag is filled with things that I get anxious about and maybe that some of you get anxious about. And Paul tells us that we need to pray.

And what happens when we pray is we can open our bag up and we can pick it up. Oh, this is a really heavy one. This is when we're anxious about a sick family member. It is really heavy. And we can take it out of our bag.

I was meant to have a second bag, but I forgot to prepare that. I'm just going to put it here. There we go. We can take it out of our bag and we can hand it over to God. And then what else is in here?

[7 : 28] We've got another one. This is also quite heavy. This is when we get anxious about telling our friends about Jesus. When we're worried that we can't do enough, that we don't know enough. That can sometimes make our bag feel really heavy.

We've also got when we're anxious about moving school. Maybe you're going into primary school or maybe you're going into high school or going off to uni. Maybe you've just moved to Glasgow. But moving to school can make us feel really anxious.

So I'll take that out of my bag because we're going to pray about that. What's here? Oh, this is a big one. I think a lot of us will feel this one. This is pressure at work. Maybe it's pressure to work harder, work longer, work more. Maybe it's pressure to work on Sundays or do things you're not necessarily comfortable with.

What other things can we be anxious about? What else is in this bag? It's so heavy. This is a big one, right? Sometimes we can get really nervous about an earthquake. It can be really illogical.

But I used to be terrified that an earthquake was going to come, shake my house, bring it to the ground, and I'd have nowhere to live. That was a big anxiety for me when I was growing up. But we can take that out of our bag because we can give it to Jesus.

[8 : 31] We've also got, oh, this is a really big one. This says, am I good enough for God? If you're a friend of Jesus, often we can get really stressed over whether we live a good enough life to be friends with him.

That's a really big worry. What else is in here? Oh, there's so many things we could be anxious about. Parents, there's a, yeah, will my child be a Christian? Can I do enough? Can I raise them well enough that they might love Jesus like I do?

Oh, there's still more in here. Maybe you're anxious about a football game coming up. You're in the cup final. Maybe you've got a big show. Oh, that's the kind of thing we can fill our rucksack with, stress and anxiety. Or maybe this is a shockingly small box for financial worries because I think for a lot of us, that's one of the biggest things at the minute.

It might take up a whole rucksack on itself. But look at all those things we could be anxious about. All of a sudden, oh, my back's so light. I'm not going to have to be worried and stressed and have a sore back at the end of this talk.

So when we have our rucksack filled with our stresses and anxieties, we can take it out. And when we pray, we hand them to God. And we can do that with absolutely anything, the biggest or the smallest things.

[9 : 43] And you know what's amazing? God can handle it. God is able to carry it for us. And he's not able to just carry my worries. He's able to carry your worries. And the person beside you's worries and everybody in this room's worries, he can carry the stresses and anxieties of the entire world and whatnot but on eyelids.

Because God's, his backpack, right? Mine's is quite big. But God's backpack is enormous. It's infinite. It's massive. Because God is so big and so powerful, he can help us.

When we give things to him, he can take them. No worries. We don't need to worry when we ask God for help. We don't need to stress, like, is God big enough to take this on for me? Jesus tells us that he wants to take our heavy weights and he wants to give us a lovely light backpack.

Jesus says this in Matthew chapter 11, verse 28. Come to me, all you who are tired and have heavy loads. I will give you rest. Accept my work and learn from me.

I am gentle and humble in spirit and you will find rest for your souls. The work that I ask you to accept is easy. The load I give you to carry is not heavy.

[10 : 56] When we go to Jesus in prayer and give him everything that is weighing us down, in return, he gives us a lovely light backpack. Our anxieties and our stresses, they feel heavy because often there's absolutely nothing we can do about them.

We feel useless. There's just nothing we can give to change these issues. But prayer changes that. Here's a quote from Corrie ten Boom that I found that I thought was incredible.

The wonderful thing about praying is that you leave a world of not being able to do something and enter God's realm where everything is possible. He specializes in the impossible.

Nothing is too great for his almighty power. Nothing is too small for his love. God is so good that he takes our prayers when we ask for help.

And he uses our prayers to help our anxiety. When we pray about worrying about not being able to do anything, God is helping us do something to remove that.

[11 : 58] He uses us. He uses our prayers as well as taking them off of us. When we pray with petition and thanksgiving, God takes the weight of our problems away. We leave that world where we can't do anything and enter God's world where everything is possible.

Now, prayer doesn't necessarily immediately remove the problem itself. Boys and girls, we can still struggle when we pray for things. Things we are anxious about can last for a very long time.

We're not going to immediately feel our weights go because, you see, the problem is that when we carry our weights for so long, we get hunched over and we walk and we're constantly walking like this. And when God takes our backpack off, we don't immediately stand up and go, Oh, yeah, I'm good because our back's really hurt.

We're still down. We don't have the weight, but it takes a while for us to learn to straighten up again and live without that anxiety or worry. Prayer doesn't take it immediately away, but it will help us to loosen and get rid of those knots and tenses in our back.

The more we give to God, the more we get used to living without the anxieties of the world around us, the better we'll feel. Boys and girls, you can pray about absolutely anything and God will help us with it.

[13 : 14] It's worth saying this again. This isn't only when we have really, really big things that we're anxious about, okay? Paul says when we're worried about anything, look at that.

If you've still got your Bibles open, look with me. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

So we're going to play a quick game. I'm going to read out some things, and the boys and girls, which is all of you today, are going to have to help me by just saying, yes or no, is the thing I'm going to say too big or too small to pray about to God?

Okay, we're going to start off with my list, right? We'll give you some easy ones. Is a football game coming up too big or too small to pray about to God? Oh, a lot of you are really nervous about football games.

This might be hard when we get some of the bigger stuff. Let me ask again. Is a football game too big or too small to pray about to God? Thanks, Greg.

[14 : 13] Is a football game too big or too small? No, okay. This better get louder as we go. Is an earthquake too big or too small to pray about to God? Is pressure at work too big or too small?

For some of you, is pressure at work too big or too small? Is financial worries too big to go to God with? Is worrying about your child becoming a Christian too big to go to God with?

Is what you're going to have for dinner tomorrow night too small to go to God with? No, it's not. Is moving school too big to go to God with? No. Is being invited to your best friend's birthday party something that you're nervous about?

Too small to go to God with? You're getting quiet. I'm going to keep going until you're loud enough. That's just so you know. Is, oh, what's this one? Talking to our friends about Jesus too big to go to God with?

No, it's not. Is a sick family member too big to go to God with? No. Is, are we good enough for God? Is our sin and our worries and our anxieties about how good we are too big to go to God with?

[15 : 25] No, there is nothing too big or too small, too massive or too minuscule to pray to God for. If we are anxious, he wants to hear you.

Our God is a God of love and he is so big, he wants every single one of us all the time to be giving every single thing we are nervous about. Paul really means it. Absolutely anything, anything that makes us anxious and worried, we should hand over to God.

He was beaten, mocked, scorned. He had shipwrecks, everything. In all of that, Paul learned to pray in all things. The writer of Psalm 94 knew this as well.

The writer of Psalm 94 was in a dangerous place. He was in distress. He was worried about his safety. But in verse 18, he says this. When I said, my foot is slipping, your unfailing love, Lord, supported me.

When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy. When the psalmist was in danger, he cried out to God and God supported him. And he took his anxiety and he gave him joy.

[16 : 32] The psalmist of Psalm 94 is not the only person God has done this for. God has been doing this for thousands of years. God does not change. So when we read Psalm 94, we can trust that God will be there for us in our anxiety.

So we're going to sing a song now, if I can invite the band up. We're going to sing a song that reminds us that God never changes. God is bigger than anything. I am the Lord and I do not change.

And even better, Catherine's coming to show us the actions. And again, you are all the kids today, so please join in. Thank you guys very much.

I'm so proud of you all doing the actions. I'm so proud. So we've learned that when we're anxious, we should pray. And now we're going to think about when we pray, we get peace.

The Lord does not change at all. He always has and always will strengthen his people when we call out to him. Paul has called us to pray anytime about anything when we're anxious. And when we do, God will give us peace.

[17 : 34] What does peace look like? Well, we know that peace lightens our load. That's what we've thought about with our backpacks and all these things. But Paul tells us more than that. Paul tells us that the peace of God transcends all understanding.

That's a big phrase. We'll get to that in a second. It transcends all understanding and will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. So this peace we receive when we give our heavy load to Jesus is beyond all understanding.

What that means is we don't really understand. It doesn't make sense. We don't get it. When Christians turn to God for help and hand over their anxieties, well, it brings us peace.

It makes the shy person confident. It makes the nervous person bold. God's peace allows Christians to face incredible circumstances and do amazing things.

God's peace transcends all understanding. It's so beyond understanding that when people see Christians with this peace, they're confused. They don't understand. How can you be going through that thing?

[18 : 42] How can you be so at peace when your mother is dying? How can you be so confident that things will work out okay when you've just been fired from your job?

When we hand these things to God, he gives us a peace that is a witness to the world around us. And it is a witness to ourselves that God is good. I'm sure you could ask so many people in this room today about a moment where this has happened.

And we'd all be able to tell you, well, actually, yes. Five years ago, eight years ago, last week, I went into this situation. Why not ask each other at the end of the service? That's a great way to witness to one another and encourage one another in this.

I could give you multiple examples from up here, but actually the more powerful ones will come from the person sitting beside you. So why not ask? God's peace transcends all understanding.

We also learn that God's peace will guard our hearts and our minds. Peace. Peace is something everybody wants. What is that one thing when the Miss Universe pageant, you know, what's your one biggest dream?

[19 : 49] World. Peace. That's what they all want. Just think of Miss Congeniality. That's all I do. And world peace is really important. It's very important. But the thing about worldly peace and world peace is that it's very fleeting.

You see, peace is actually, in the world, really hard to keep. World peace is something that needs guarded. We have keepers of the peace, whether that's the police or whether that's the NATO peacekeeping force.

If we don't have these people, there will always be someone who tries to get rid of peace for their own benefits. So if the world's peace is something we need to guard, well, God's peace is something that guards us.

You see, God's peace needs nothing from us. We cannot work to get it. We can't work to keep it. There is no force that ensures we will lose it. No, God's peace keeps us.

And it keeps our minds and our hearts. God's peace keeps our minds because when we learn and know the truth of the amazing things that Jesus has done for us, our minds are kept at peace.

[20 : 55] Because when we know God's promises, when we understand them, well, God will keep our minds at peace. He will guard them. He does this through his word, the Bible.

Boys and girls, that's why we think the Bible is the most important thing. It's why every single Sunday at KidZone, next door, we look at the Bible. We look at stories together. We learn about Jesus.

We learn about everything. The whole thing is important for us so he can guard our minds. And the more we have God's word working in our mind, in our brains, in our memory, the more will he guard our minds from the things around us.

Knowing God's word is like building a big wall that will protect us from the immediate onslaught of the worries of this world, our anxieties. But the thing about worries and anxieties is that they often worm their way in anyway.

They get past that wall we've built, however easy that is for these anxieties, and they infect our hearts. Our worries and our stresses are often never logical things, but they're illogical.

[21 : 55] They're things we feel more than we know. But God's peace will protect our heart as well. Now, when the Bible talks about our heart, it's the home of all of our feelings and our emotions. So when we know God's peace in our hearts, we will feel God's peace.

And we should feel it. God's peace is not something just to be known, it's to be felt. So as we listen to Paul's advice and give over all of our anxieties, all the time, God promises us that we will feel that peace seep into our hearts.

If we expect to feel God's peace when we are anxious, he will be kind and give it to us. We can feel the joy Paul talks about in verse 4. We can feel God's peace as opposed to only feeling stressed and anxious.

Things that once weighed us down heavily will feel lighter, and our emotions will be more in line with God as his peace guards us. Now, this isn't a quick thing. This isn't immediate.

It will not come tomorrow if you struggle with anxiety now. But the more we turn to God and let our gaze linger on his goodness and his promises, the more likely we are to feel this peace.

[23 : 11] And if you do not feel this peace, you are not a bad Christian. If you do not feel this peace, you are not doing something wrong. But God's word does say we should and can feel these things.

So if you've gotten used to being someone who knows a lot but doesn't feel it, can I encourage you to pray and hand that over to God? If you're someone who knows and does not feel it, then follow the spiritual disciplines that Paul recommends and it will come.

Not as a tick-block exercise, but as a genuine way to know and feel and love the Lord our God. Where do we turn to for that peace? Where do we turn to to feel that peace?

Well, Paul tells us it is in Christ Jesus. There's no place we can get this peace apart from him. The world's peace will fall. Everything else will fall apart from Christ.

Now, let me read Matthew 11 again because it's worth remembering. Come to me, all you who are tired and have heavy loads. I will give you rest. Accept my work and learn from me. I am gentle and humble in spirit.

[24 : 16] And you will find rest for your souls. The work I ask you to accept is easy. The load I give you to carry is not heavy. It is only Jesus who can truly take the heavy loads and give us the rest we so seek, both in our minds and our hearts.

This peace is part of our union with Christ. When we become Christians, we're united with him and we get all these benefits. We get peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with the world.

We have peace with God because in Romans chapter 5 we read this, Therefore, since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus brings peace with God because he died and rose again. Jesus paid the price for all of our sins and rose that he might wash us clean.

So because we have peace with God, we have no need to be anxious about, Are we a good enough Christian? Am I doing enough? Because Jesus died to pay the price that we might all have peace with God.

[25 : 27] We no longer have to be anxious about our struggles with sin. We fight them knowing that the battle is won, the victory already attained. Jesus has done everything we need.

He also brings us peace amidst the troubles of the world. This is John chapter 16. I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

In that whole section of John, Jesus is warning his disciples that it will be hard following Jesus. But he has told us these things so that we may have peace.

When we face difficulties, pressure at work, pressure at school, when we have people who are trying to get us to stop being Christians, whether that's family, whether that's friends, whether that's work, we know that we can overcome that because Jesus already has.

We have peace that the world will never actually affect us because the victory has been won. Jesus has overcome the entire world because of his death and resurrection.

[26 : 33] The people who are united with him, everybody who is a friend of Jesus, will know that forever and ever and ever, no matter what we face, we will be with him. And nothing, nothing can change that.

Lastly, a great example of that hardship, sorry. A great example of that hardship of the world around us is Paul, the guy who wrote Philippians, who's in prison as he speaks. He writes this in chapter one, I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now, as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or death, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

When we read that, we are often really encouraged, but the foundation of that statement is that Paul has peace with everything that's going on around him.

Paul knows that no matter whether he lives or dies, whether he's beaten and mocked, whether he's in a shipwreck or a legal courtroom trial, whatever he faces, Paul knows that the Lord is in control over all things so that he can even say, to live is Christ, to die is gain.

Boys and girls, he's not worried about being ashamed. He's not worried about dying. He's not worried about the people around him dying because he knows that even if the worst happens in this world, it is nothing compared to what God has done for us.

[27 : 57] And God has given us assurance that those things are but fleeting, temporary things. Paul knows that Jesus has power over all, even death itself.

He can only know that. Paul can only say these things. We can only believe these things when we trust the peace we have in Christ. Whatever anxieties you face in life, do as Paul says, hand them over to God, empty your backpack at the cross and take that light burden that Jesus promises us.

We will still face difficulties, but in Christ we can have peace through them because he has overcome the world. He wants to take the weight you have and give you lightness, give you peace.

We never stumble accidentally towards peace. We're not gonna just suddenly be living our normal lives and like bump into it by mistake. This is a spiritual practice Paul is calling us to.

Boys and girls, we have to pray about all things. All the time, we have to make an effort to do that. We can never accidentally grow in the peace of God.

[29 : 05] Whether it's in Thanksgiving, before dinner, just saying, Lord, I was so stressed about this today, but you are good. Thank you for this food. Amen. The more we turn to God in prayer, the more we will know and feel his peace that is beyond all understanding.

We're actually gonna do something slightly different now, okay? That's the end of my talk, but we're gonna spend five minutes more, okay? We have a bit of time now to reflect on what we've heard. One natural outworking of what we've heard is to turn and pray with one another.

Share something you're nervous about. Share something you're anxious about. Whether it's the smallest of smalls or the biggest of bigs, and pray for it with the person beside you. Pray on your own about it. This is a really free space.

You are allowed to do whatever you want now. If you don't feel comfortable praying, why not just discuss what we've thought about? Why not ask the person beside you for a moment when they have known that peace? We really believe that God can fill each other with peace and remove our anxieties.

So let's ask God if you want to. Boys and girls, if you're with your mum and dad, why not ask them, or whoever's brought you, why not ask them what makes them anxious and pray for them? Mums and dads, ask your kids what makes them anxious and pray for them.

[30 : 19] Let's take five minutes now. I'll come up in a few minutes and pray to close properly, but just turn to the person beside you. Don't turn. It's all okay. Yeah, just reflect on what we've heard. Let me just cut in there.

Whether you're praying or just chatting, please don't worry. Let me just... I'm just going to pray for all of us now before we move on with the service.

Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you that you can give a peace that is beyond all understanding. Lord, I just pray that you would take away all of our anxiety, take away those heavy weights that we all have on our backs, Lord.

Help us to continually hand them all over to you. Lord, we thank you that it is a light backpack that you give us in Jesus. Thank you that through him we have peace with you and the world around us and peace in ourselves.

Lord, I pray that you would help us know your goodness and your peace and help us feel that peace too. Help us to encourage one another. Thank you for time to pray and chat. And we just thank you that you have sent your son that we might know that peace.

[31 : 44] We pray these things in your holy name. Amen. Amen.