

The Battle of The Mind
Prison Letters Series
May 5, 2024

Good morning church family! It may be gloomy outside, but we've got lots of good news inside today. We are continuing to work our way through the book of Philippians this morning - and we are going to pick it up with chapter 4:2

Remember Paul is writing this letter from prison. He had helped plant this church approximately 10 years prior to writing this letter. He loved the people of Philippi and was very thankful for all the support he had received from them over the years. He founded this church on his second missionary journey – He felt a call to go to Macedonia (which was where Philippi was) after receiving a vision of a man from there begging him “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” (Acts 16:9) So Acts 16:10 says: “We got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

His ministry started with a businesswoman named Lydia and her family. It spread from there to the jailer and his family – who had originally arrested Paul and Silas – but after seeing God show up in an amazing way- they believed and were baptized - and now it was a growing church. Paul was writing to encourage them – that despite adversity - God wanted them to experience His peace and joy.

And that's where we are picking up the story today. I think today's message is relevant for a lot of people. In this section Paul deals with the issues of anxiety and worry.

According to the **American Psychiatric Association** 70 percent of Americans deal with various kinds of anxiety:

- 70% were anxious about keeping themselves or their families safe.
- 68% were anxious about keeping their identity safe.
- 66% were anxious about their health.
- 65% were anxious about paying bills or expenses.
- 59% were anxious about the impact of climate change on the planet.
- 50% were anxious about the opioid epidemic.
- 45% were anxious about the impact of emerging technology on day-to-day life.

Two-thirds (68%) of American adults say that children and teens have more mental health problems than they did a decade ago. Over half of parents say they are concerned about their children's use of technology (59%) and mental state (55%), and 31% said they'd had difficulty scheduling appointments for their children with mental health professionals.

According to an article from the National Institute of Mental Health, about 40 million U.S. adults have some type of anxiety disorder. Anxiety is often a normal part of life. Public speaking, job interviews, even meeting someone for the first time can increase your heart and breathing rate and/or send a surge of blood flow to your brain inducing feelings of anxiety.

Your body is capable of dealing with short bursts of this physical response as it is preparing you to face a stressful situation. However, after a prolonged period of time, anxiety disorders can have significant negative effects on your overall physical, relationship and mental health and wellbeing as well as one's ability to function at work.

Prolonged emotional stress and worry can lead to a variety of health concerns and can even influence hormonal levels. The body's central nervous system goes into overdrive and releases cortisol that can boost sugar levels and triglycerides. But if cortisol is constantly being triggered it can result in physical reactions, including: short-term memory loss and concentration problems, digestive disorders, sleep disorders, lowered immune system, elevated blood pressure and in rare cases even a heart attack.

Patients report that emotional symptoms are just as debilitating and include incessant worry, dread, inability to relax, spinning thinking, racing thoughts, negativity and projected negative outcomes, fixation on thoughts surrounding safety or death, having a looming dark cloud over one's head, feeling hopeless about the future - and at times feeling like one is losing their mind. These thoughts are often all-consuming and inescapable and are difficult to control.

So even though this letter was written 2000 years ago – I believe it is good medicine for what ails a number of us today. If anybody had reason to be anxious or worried about something – it was the Apostle Paul. He was on trial for sharing his faith in Jesus Christ. In some ways - his life was in the hands of the judge who was going to hear his case. He also received news – that two of the ladies that he

had worked with in the church at Philippi – were now feuding – and Paul knew that division in the church was not a healthy thing.

But instead of wringing his hands in fear – causing headaches and belly aches – Paul took the time to explain to them and to us – **how to overcome worry and anxiety.**

Let's pick up the story in **Philippians 4:2-7**

Paul starts out addressing the issues of division in the church. These are two good church going ladies. They had done ministry with Paul there in the church - and he was encouraging them to work out their differences - and he also encouraging others in the church to help resolve these issues – rather than allowing it to fester and divide the church.

From there he encourages them – **TO REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS! I WILL SAY IT AGAIN REJOICE!!!**

Paul wasn't offering a quick fix - worldly response - to the very real problems of anxiety and worry – like we saw in the late 80's popular island song called "Don't Worry Be Happy"

Play song / read lyrics

The island song is the worlds way of dealing with stress – find something to make you happy – drugs, alcohol, pleasure, - something to numb your pain – or help you temporarily escape your reality.

But Paul gives us some great advice so that we can have victory over worry and anxiety:

NO MATTER YOUR CIRCUMSTANCE – REJOICE! That's crazy how do we do that?

Let your gentleness be evident to all.

- We don't have to freak out when life doesn't work out just the way we thought it should. Remember Jesus told us that in this world we would have some trouble.
- **THE LORD IS NEAR! That's the Key!**

In Matthew **6:25-34** Jesus tells us that worry and anxiety will get us no where:

- God loves you! You are valuable to Him! You are more important to Him than birds – and look at the way He cares for them.
- Look at the beauty of the world around you and how God cares for it – You are much more important to God than the creation! When he made it – it was good – but when He made you – IT WAS VERY GOOD!
- YOU ARE LOVED! YOU HAVE GREAT VALUE! YOU ARE IMPORTANT TO GOD! YOU ARE NOT JUST MATTER – YOU MATTER TO GOD!!!
- HE IS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER – HE KNOWS WHAT YOU NEED.
- HE ENCOURAGE US TO TRUST HIM!
- WE NEED TO LET HIM BE GOD – AND STOP TRYING TO DO IT FOR HIM

(Back to Philippians 4)

Don't be anxious (worried) about anything.

- Greek word “careful” anxious – means to be pulled in different directions. Our hopes pull us in one direction – our fears pull us in another direction. Old English word “worry” -means to strangle. That’s what happens when we live in this “no-mans” land between faith and fear. We are strangled – we are paralyzed – and can’t move into those things the Father wants us to have.
- Worry is wrong thinking (our mind)
- Worry is wrong feeling (our heart)
- Worry is the great thief of joy.
- Vs 7 - The peace of God – will guard – (garrison, guard like a soldier) your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

WHY WORRY – WHEN YOU CAN PRAY!

- **Pray about everything!** Three different words given here for prayer: **prayer** is general communication with God. Adoration, devotion, worship. When we find ourselves worrying, our first action ought to be to get alone with God and get our eyes and thoughts focused on Him.
- **Petition – supplication.** Honest heart felt prayer sharing our needs and problems with God. Jesus poured out His heart to His Father. We need to learn to do that as well. Prayer has the chance to change things – worry only gives us gray hair, belly aches, and headaches!

- **Thanksgiving.** God loves it when we say thanks! Just as we parents like it when our children appreciate what we do for them – our Heavenly Father feels the same way!
- **Once we've committed everything to God in prayer – then the peace comes!** We've given it to the Father – there's no need for us to carry it anymore.

Right Thinking

- **The antidote to worry is a secure mind!** Isaiah 26:3 says: "You will keep in perfect peace those whose mind is steadfast, because they trust in you."
- **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, **and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.**"
- **We have to learn to replace our "stinking thinking" with the good things that the Lord has for us.**
- **Philippians 4:8-9**

Summary

Rejoice regardless of your circumstances!

Remember - the Lord is near – so there's no need to freak out.

Review truth - You are loved, You have great value, You are important to God

Don't worry about anything – Pray about everything!

Replace your worrying – with the good stuff of God's Word and His Creation

Experience the Peace of God which transcends everything this world has to offer!

Worship Team

Benediction:

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

"May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; May the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."