

Overcoming Anxiety

Phil 4:4-8

Have you ever just laughed at God's timing of things? And when I say laugh I mean you have to laugh otherwise you will cry? I dropped my youngest child off for his freshman year of college 48 hours ago. Which means while I was writing a sermon on anxiety I was also packing up my baby and all his earthly possessions, making all his favorite meals one more time, filling out last minute college paperwork, and trying to instill 18 years of wisdom into his heart and mind. Talk about anxiety!!! People quickly learned not to ask me how I was doing this week, because I was not ok!!!

In general, I am not an anxious person. The first time I can remember feeling overwhelming anxiety was the day I brought my second child home from the hospital. Not my first child, that one we handled pretty well. But the second one nearly did me in. Nate and Bella are just 18 months apart in age and we had worked really hard to get Bella on a schedule before we brought the new baby home. And it worked. She had a relatively easy and smooth bed time routine that she rarely fought. Which meant Erik and I had some much needed downtime at the end of each day. We could relax and unwind and mentally prepare ourselves to do it all again the next day. We treasured that time in the evenings. And I treasured my set bedtime! But as Erik tucked Bella in that first night of parenting two, I looked down at the new born in my arms and I had the closest thing I have ever felt to a full blown panic attack. That's the best way I can describe it. I had this all consuming, overwhelming, debilitating realization that HE didn't have a bed time. I had no idea when or IF he would fall asleep. Would this day ever end? He had slept all day - like new borns do, what if he stayed up all night?

What if he never went back to sleep?

What if I didn't ever get to sleep?

Isabella was going to wake up at her usual time in the morning and expect me to fully attend to all her needs and what if Nate is still awake?

What was I supposed to do?

What if...

My breath got ragged, my heart began to race, my mind would not settle, and I experienced a level of anxiety I had never experienced before.

That might seem like a silly example, but that's the thing with anxiety - it doesn't always make sense.

Now, there are times when anxiety is the only logical response to a situation. This past May, two of my three kids graduated on the same weekend, just hours apart from each other one from high school, the other from college. The Friday before graduation, I woke up to a phone call from our college aged son asking if our health insurance would work at the KU health clinic because he was pretty sure he had broken his foot the night before (a mere 4 day before he was commissioning into the army.) That same afternoon, my daughter was getting ready to take her new car in to the shop for literally thousands of dollars worth of repairs, but also needs to get her dog into the vet for a tick removal we tried but could not get out, and my parents are less than 30 minutes from my house. And as I'm juggling her car and dog and who is taking who where, my high school aged son calls to tell me he was just in a car accident. We have now totaled 4 cars in 4 years in the Lundgren household.

The pastors here all have a group chat with each other and I texted that group and simply said, pray for me, I'm not ok. That whole weekend and honestly for weeks after I could still feel the anxiety in my body from all that happened graduation weekend, the emotional highs and lows of that weekend were a rollercoaster ride I don't ever want to do again. And I had this lingering pervasive unease inside of me telling me things were not ok for weeks after that.

I don't think I'm alone in these kinds of struggles, as Pastor Mark shared last week...

- Anxiety is the #1 mental health condition we face in the US.
- 42.5 million adults (19.1%) experience anxiety on an annual basis
- 31.1% of us will have clinical anxiety at some point in our lifetime.
- And it's not just an adult problem There was a 52% increase in anxiety among 10-24 year olds from 1990-2021, almost 32% of teens battle anxiety.
- And it's not getting better, 43% of Americans felt MORE anxious in 2024 than in 2023.

But for those of you who live with or struggle with anxiety - it's not a statistic. It's an ongoing battle you fight against a seemingly invisible enemy. And I do not for a second pretend to have the answers you are looking for. The intent with this series is not to stand up here and throw a couple Bible verses at you and assume you are now going to be ok. Our hope, our prayer is that we are able to encourage you a bit, point you to Jesus and the hope that he offers. And maybe give you a strategy or two, some practical steps you can take today to help manage that anxiety.

The reality is, you might need someone to talk to - a friend, a pastor, or a professional, licensed counselor. You might also be one of the almost 10 million people who need medication to help control your anxiety. And that is absolutely Ok. There is no shame in needing help. Whether it is counseling or medication. God does have a lot to say

about our anxious minds, and we will get into all of that. AND I want to encourage you to get any professional help you might need it in order to manage your anxiety.

We have list of professional Christian counselors that pastor have vetted and recommend. We have copies of that list printed in the lobby at the welcome desk you can grab or you can scan this QR code (slide of QR code for counseling list) to receive a copy. You can also email one of the pastors and we'll send you a copy. We will do all we can to help you get the help you need. We even have a therapist assist program if you need help paying for counseling.

So, with that in mind, we are returning to Philippians 4:4-9 today, Let's stand and read God's word together

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Let's pray

Today we are picking up right where Pastor Mark left off last week, and we are looking at verse 6 which begins with the words, "do not be anxious about anything..." which right off the bat, I'm not gonna lie, sounds a bit ridiculous. Because there is plenty in this world to be anxious about - has Paul NOT had teenage drivers? Or teenagers in general? Or sent a kid to college? Or lost a job? Or been sick? Or had a loved one who was sick? He can't honestly expect us to never be anxious about anything can he?

And after studying this verse, I don't actually think that is what he is saying at all. In fact, earlier in this very letter Paul praises Timothy for being anxious! In Phil 2:19-20, Paul tells the people of Philippi, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. Philippians 2:19-20

In the original greek, the word that has been translated in verse 20 as "genuine concern" is *merimnao* (marry now) and it is the exact same word Paul uses in 4:6 where it is translated as "anxiety." So, why is Timothy praised for it chapter 2 and we are told never to do it in chapter 4?

Anxiety in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing. There are times in life when we SHOULD be anxious. It serves as a warning system God built into our bodies to keep us alert to danger. In chapter 2, when Paul's talking about Timothy's "*merimnow*" it's just that. It's a temporary, appropriate care and concern. This is a GOOD thing, Paul is essentially saying, there is no one else like Timothy, they all look out for their own interests, but not Tim. Tim will show genuine concern or worry for the people of Philippi. It is perfectly normal and even praiseworthy to show worry or concern or be anxious for a time, like when one kid breaks a foot, another kid totals a car all in the same day. That is appropriate care and concern. That is appropriate anxiety!

But in chapter 4, the grammatical structure Paul uses indicates he's not talking about something that is temporary. He's talking about an ongoing state of "*merimnow*". He's talking about perpetual anxiety. It is the state of always, continually, consistently being anxious about a whole lot of things. To live in a state of ongoing, perpetual anxiety, that is not what God wants for you. And Paul doesn't just suggest we avoid this kind of anxiety - he commands it. As Max Lucado writes in his book *Anxious for Nothing* "The presence of anxiety is unavoidable, but the prison of anxiety is optional" - Max Lucado And Paul is commanding us to stay out of the prison of anxiety no matter what.

So how do we avoid or free ourselves from that prison of anxiety? Paul offers us a four solutions in this passage, three of them we will talk about today, and Pastor Jim will do a deep dive into the fourth one next week. The first solution Paul offers actually comes just before verse 6.

As many of you probably know, Ancient Greek didn't have punctuation. So we don't really know where one thought unit or sentence ends and the next begins. Most English translations end verse 5 with a period. "The Lord is near."

But in the ESV the end of verse 5 has a semi-colon. It is the first part of the sentence that is verse 6. "The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything..."

Now I don't know which one is correct. But I do prefer the ESV translation. And here's why. The semi-colon links these thought units together. Do not be anxious about anything...BECAUSE The Lord is at hand. BECAUSE the Lord is at hand you don't have to experience perpetual debilitating anxiety over anything.

Scholars don't exactly agree about what the words "the Lord is at hand" means. Some argue it's referring to Jesus 2nd coming. That because the return of our Lord is near, we don't have to worry about about this life here on earth or what will happen tomorrow. Others believe it is referring to Jesus promise to never leave us or forsake us; that no matter what we are going through, Jesus is at hand. We just have to call on him and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will be with us. Again, I don't know which translation is right, to me they both work.

We don't have to suffer from the prison of perpetual anxiety because this is not our home. This life, here on this earth with all its struggle and hardship and worry and anxiety and trouble - which by the way Jesus told us we would have - is temporary. Jesus will come again. And that coming of the Lord is at hand. We might not know exactly when it will happen, but we do know it will. And every day is one day closer. And we know when Jesus comes again, we will have a home in heaven with his Father whose house has many rooms, room for anyone who calls on Jesus as Lord. The Lord is indeed at hand, so we don't need to be anxious about anything.

I know that truth doesn't pay your bills. It doesn't heal your current pain, or fix the car, or get you the job, or bring your kids back to the faith. But it might put things in perspective. The pain, worry, anxiety, fear you are facing right now will NOT last forever. It will not follow you into eternity with Jesus. It won't. Scripture tells us this. And I believe it.

And in the here and now, while we are living on this earth. Jesus has not abandoned us. He is at hand, speak the name of Jesus, and feel His presence and power in your life here and now.

In Matthew 28:20 Jesus says And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:20

Deuteronomy assures us he will not leave us or forsake us Deut 31:6

James tells us to draw near to God and he will draw near to us. James 4:8

David wrote,

Where shall I go from your Spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence? Psalm 139:7

Friends, He is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in Spirit Psalm 34:18

You don't need to be anxious because the Lord is at hand. That is Pauls first solution to overcoming perpetual anxiety, trust that Jesus will come again, and call on the name of Jesus because he is near. His second and third solutions are similar to each other, but a little different. Paul tells us,

do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by **PRAYER** and **SUPPLICATION**

Instead of giving into anxiety, Paul encourages us to focus on Prayer in general and supplication in particular.

He tells us that in everything - every single circumstance, every worry, every fear, every uncertainty, every anxious thought, everything we are to pray. Paul uses the word (*proseuche* - pro-see-HEY) This is the most general term for communication with God and it includes all forms of prayer - worship, adoration, praise, confession as well as the more specific supplications we will get to in a bit.

Here's what I have experienced, it is easy to run to God with our list of things that are wrong, things we want him to fix, help that we need, and our list of demands so to speak. I remember when my kids were little and they would run to me yelling, screaming, crying with whatever immediate need they had and my sole job as their mom was to fix whatever was wrong. Preferably immediately. That's it, that was my job, to fix their problems. Sometimes it still feels like that's my job, but I digress.

I think it can be tempting to approach God in that same manner. God I need your help and I need it now, I just lost my job, I just got the diagnosis, I just found out, and I need you to...

And let me be clear, God is ok with that. He gets it. He understands our fears and our worries, and he WANTS us to bring those to him. Running to God with your problems and asking Him to fix it is absolutely the right thing to do. But how much different would WE feel if as we approach God with our lists, we also reminded ourselves who he is first.

Heavenly Father, YOU are the God of the universe. You are the creator of all things, nothing is beyond your control, nothing is too big for you, and nothing is too small for you. You care for me, you have called me your child, and like a good, good Father, you are near to me. You know my heart, my worries, every aspect of my life, and God I am so scared because...

We know...hopefully you know... ok men you might not know, but most women know... it helps to talk about our worries and anxieties. And if it helps to talk about these things with people, friends, pastors, counselors. How much more helpful would it be to talk about them with God. Out loud if you need to! We are to pray about everything. Not just the big things, not just the "spiritual" things. Not just the things we think God wants to hear about. Everything.

Worship, adoration, praise, confession...and then supplication.

“Because the Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication...

Paul uses a different word for his third solution. The word for supplication also means pleading or entreating. This kind of asking requires humility. You know you can't solve the problem on your own- that's why you're anxious about it! You need God. This supplication isn't making demands of God, but making humble requests. And Paul says to make these humble supplications, this pleading and entreating with Thanksgiving. Which, honestly, is so much harder than it sounds.

When you find yourself in the prison of anxiety, and your heart is racing and your breathing is ragged, and your body is stressed. It can feel nearly impossible to give thanks. What in the world do you have to be thankful about in this moment?

Did you know that in recent years, neuroscientists have started studying gratitude? Pastor Mark talked about this last week. Studies are now proving that gratitude or thanksgiving activates regions for the brain that are associated with reward, feelings of contentment & emotional wellbeing.

- Regular practice of gratitude can lead to long-term positive changes in the brain, supporting mental health & resilience.
- Things like keeping a gratitude journal can improve mood, increase empathy & strengthen social bonds.

Science is once again proving what Scripture has always said.

How do you do that in the midst of overwhelming anxiety? Well, it definitely won't happen naturally. You will have to be very intentional about it. Next week Pastor Jim will talk more about controlling your thought life. But it can help if you can to build habits of gratitude. Begin to do some of those things Pastor Mark talked about last week...

1. Find things/times to celebrate - whether its official holidays or little personal things, choose to celebrate. (You are special plate)
2. Listen to worship music - just because. Keep it on in the house. JT knows that if he wakes up on a Saturday to worship music playing, it means we are cleaning the house! It makes it a more joyful task
3. Keep a gratitude journal - Write down all the things you are thankful for. All of God's past mercies in your life. Examples of his grace and his provision.

And then, the next time anxiety rears it's ugly head, pull out your journal and pray through it, thanking God for all he has done.

Because the Lord is at hand, you do not have to be trapped in a prison of anxiety over anything, but over every. single. thing pray and offer humble supplication with thanksgiving to God. Three solutions to your anxious mind

1. Remembering the Lord is near
2. Prayer
3. Supplication with thanksgiving

Now, before we close I want to get super practical. Paul just gave you a very reproducible outline for how to pray through anxiety. I'm going to lay it out just a bit different in a common acronym you may already know called the ACT prayer model

A.C.T.S.

Adoration

Confession

Thanksgiving

Supplication

Adoration - start your prayer by praising God, talk about God first. His names and attributes, his power and his glory.

Confession - confess your sin to God, and ask for his forgiveness

Thanksgiving - thank God for all he has done, is doing and will do for you. Thank him for his mercy and grace, love and compassion.

Supplication - and finally humbly present your requests

This is essentially what Paul has just laid out for you. And if you practice this model on a regular and consistent basis at times when you are not anxious, it will feel much more natural to pray this way when you are anxious.

But this isn't the only way to pray through anxiety. I'm going to get a little brainy for a minute. When we are stressed or in an anxious state our sympathetic nervous system (SNS) in our body kicks into gear releasing stress hormones that elevate our heart rate, change our breathing pattern, and release adrenaline that causes our body to be on alert for potential danger. This is how God designed our bodies to work. But, when

anxiety is something we struggle with, that sympathetic nervous system can get over stimulated. And our body will mis-read or hyper focus on dangers that may not be actually be present.

But God also designed our bodies to get out of this anxious state by activating our parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). Our parasympathetic nervous system is the counter action that helps settles our heart rate, slows our breathing, and calms the adrenaline rush produced by the SNS. One of the ways to activate our PNS is by managing our breathing and we can do that with prayer, specifically a practice called Breath Prayer.

This is an ancient Christian tradition that can help activate our PNS. Breath prayers are short, usually scripture-based phrases synchronized with your breathing. The simplicity of breath prayers lie in their ability to combine intentional breathing with Scripture. They offer a quick and effective way to center yourself and connect to God, providing a moment of peace and calm instead of giving into anxiety. If you were here last week we did a modification of this during our corporate prayer time.

To really help activate your PNS your inhale should be shorter than your exhale. Inhale to 1-2 words, exhale to 4-6 words. For example "Be still, and know that I am God". Whatever scripture or phrase you choose you'll want to repeat at least 7 times. This breathing pattern, will activate your parasympathetic nervous system and begin to calm your body.

That is just one tool, but there are actually a lot of spiritual practices that can help with anxiety. If you happened to be on our women's retreat this past year, our speaker was Summer Joy Gross and she has dedicated years of her life to learning and teaching these types practices. She has a podcast called The Presence Project (show picture of podcast) where she helps people Practice resting in the heart of God. I highly recommend this podcast for anyone, but especially if you struggle with anxiety. She has many different spiritual practices you can try from Lectio Divina to grounding exercises. You might want to check it out. If you do, I would go back to her very first podcast where she sets the stage for you.

Things that you can try today

1. The ACTS prayer model
2. Breathe prayer
3. The presence project podcast

Remember that the Lord is at hand, so you don't have to be trapped in a prison of anxiety over anything. No matter what happens, in every, single situation pray and then make your humble supplication - with thanksgiving - to God.

Let's pray.