

A4N: Week 4_WHEN PEACE TAKES THE WATCH

Text: Phil. 4:1–9, focus on verses 7 and 9 | Jeff Sparks

INTRO SELF and SERIES

This is the fourth and final message in our Anxious for Nothing series. My hope is that it has been both deeply practical and deeply scriptural. // Week by week, this series has pointed us to God's help when **anxiety** and **fear** sound the alarm. Let me remind you where we have been.

In Week 1: Pastor Mark > We learned that anxiety can be part of the body's God-given alarm system. But we were never meant to live under its rule. Because the Lord is near, we can practice unshakable joy in every season and let His gentleness become visible through us.

In Week 2: Pastor Tami > We learned that anxious feelings do not have to become a prison. Because the Lord is near, we can bring every fear to Him in prayer, with humble requests and thanksgiving. And she gave us practical ways to help both body and soul do exactly that.

Last Week: Pastor Jim helped us Call our minds back to what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and worthy of praise.

Today: we will learn what comes next: Because the Lord is near, God's Peace takes the watch, and the God of Peace walks the road with us.

Out of respect for God's Word, please stand as we read our passage from Philippians 4:4-9.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 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. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, You do not shame anxious hearts. You do not stand at a distance from the fear we are facing. You come near, and You stand beside us. Give us grace to tell You the truth about what we are carrying this morning // faith to place it into Your hands // and freedom to receive what only You can give. Let the peace of God guard us, and the God of peace meet us here. In Christ's Name we pray, Amen.

Introduction — The King's Keys

[Tech Note: For this illustration, please keep slides up until next one appears; do not return to Series main slide until illustration is completed]



[Slide: KKCeremony1.jpg] Every night at seven minutes to ten, a small procession begins inside the Tower of London. // [Slide: WarderCandle.jpg] The Chief Yeoman Warder steps out in a red Watch Coat and a Tudor bonnet. // In one hand he carries a lantern still lit by a single candle.



[Slide: Warder.jpg] In the other, a ring of keys. [[[[pause]]]]

[Slide: Guard.jpg] An escort from the garrison meets him, and together they lock the outer gates, then the inner ones. On the way back, a sentry steps out of the darkness and challenges them. At ten, a bugle sounds the Last Post, and the keys are carried on and handed to the King's representative.

This nightly re-enactment is called the *Ceremony of the King's Keys*.

If you ever find yourself in London, go and see it. This ceremony has been performed every single night for seven hundred years — through plague, through fire, even through the bombs of the Blitz — almost without fail.

Now, of course, there is a reason I am telling you this. // There is **ONE DETAIL** in that ceremony I do not want you to miss.

It is found in **WHAT THE SENTRY CALLS OUT IN THE DARK:**
"Whose keys?"
"They are the King's Keys!"

[Slide: King Charles—keep on screen till next slide]



Every night, that ceremony says the same thing: the citizens of Great Britain rest under the protection, the power, and the care of the King.

The Chief Warder carries the KING'S KEYS. He handles them every night. He uses them far more than the King ever will. He has real work to do with them.

But they are never his keys.

[Slide: **WarderCandle**] But imagine that one night the Chief Warder decides otherwise. He has walked that route for years. He knows every hinge, every shadow, every sound the river makes. And a thought settles in his mind:

"I am the one who watches these gates night after night. I am the one who knows what is out there. These keys are safer in my pocket than in anybody else's hands. Therefore, they should not be called the KING'S KEYS. They should be called MY KEYS!"

He does not have the KING'S POWER // or the KING'S ARMY // or the KING'S AUTHORITY. But he never stops watching for danger. Soon he is seeing threats everywhere. // And it is not long before he is exhausted, frantic, and crushed under a weight he was never meant to carry.

Most of us will never lock the gates of an ancient fortress. But every one of us knows what it is to be entrusted with the care of people we love — and then quietly decide we had better keep the keys ourselves rather than hand them back to the King.

[Tech note: you can return to normal slide progression now]

That is a pretty good picture of anxiety and worry.

One of the most troubling things about anxiety and worry is how much it can feel like love. // **Doesn't it seem that way to you?**

We worry **most** about what matters **most**: // a child, a grandchild, a marriage, a diagnosis, a job, a decision we cannot take back, a future we cannot yet see. // And somewhere inside us, anxiety strikes a quiet bargain. // *If I keep thinking about this, maybe I can keep it safe. If I stop worrying, maybe I have stopped caring. If I stay afraid, at least I will stay ready.*

Now, the body's alarm is a gift. It wakes us when we need waking. But picture an alarm inside a walled city that will not stop ringing. Every shadow is an

approaching army. // Every sound is an attack. // The gates are never opened. // Nobody sleeps. Nobody works. Nobody leaves. // Ordinary life becomes impossible.

The alarm was meant to alert the city. It was never meant to govern the city.

That is exactly what anxiety tries to do. It is an alarm that wants to become the guard. // It notices what could go wrong — it may even spot a real threat — and then it reaches for the keys: *I will stand watch over this city! I will protect the people I love! I will secure the future I need guaranteed!*

But anxiety cannot protect what it loves. All it can do is ring. // So the city never sleeps. The alarm keeps sounding, keeps fretting, keeps rehearsing everything that might go wrong — and nobody inside those walls knows a moment of peace.

And into that exhausted city Paul writes: “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The alarm does not have to guard the city. God has appointed another guard.

So here is where we are going this morning.

1. Anxiety tries to guard.
2. We place everything before God in Prayer.
3. God’s Peace takes up its post.
4. The God of peace walks our road with us.

1. Anxiety Tries to Guard What It Loves

Paul begins, *“do not be anxious about anything.”* Lift that sentence out of its setting and it can sound almost cruel — as if Paul were sitting somewhere comfortable, handing out easy advice to people with real problems.

He is not. // Paul writes these words in chains, with his own execution a real possibility. // The church is under threat from those who seek its destruction // Beloved church member, Epaphroditus nearly died. // Euodia and Syntyche are at odds. // Pressure outside; strain inside.

That is why I believe Paul opens the chapter with *“stand firm.”* (v.1), and why he says in *Verse 6, “Do not be anxious for anything” — or, said in its positive form, “Be Anxious for Nothing.”*

Paul is not writing to people with nothing to fear. He is writing to people with every reason to be afraid. AND All of us can relate to that.

God has entrusted every one of us with people to care about — a family, a friend, a neighbor, our church. **//** That care is not Anxiety. **//** It is an assignment from GOD!

Paul writes in Phil. 2:20: “For I have no one like [Timothy] who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.” *[Tami > genuine concern > same healthy word > that has not yet been changed into anxiety].*

And **Paul praises Timothy for his Genuine Concern!**

So when does **HEALTHY GENUINE CONCERN** become **ANXIETY, WORRY, and FEAR?** What is the tipping point? Where is the line that is crossed and we step from **HEALTHY CARE AND CONCERN** becomes **UNHELPFUL ANXIETY** Here is the line between them:

HEALTHY CARE & Concern will ask: “What is mine to do?” *[What have I been entrusted to do?]* ANXIETY WILL ASK: “How do I guarantee the outcome?” *[repeat]*

- That’s an important distinction! You can even feel the difference at two in the morning. **Healthy Care and Concern says**, “**Call the doctor first thing when the office opens tomorrow.**”
- **Anxiety says**, “Until then, Google every symptom, rehearse every worst-case scenario, and plan for the worst—so I can control the outcome!”

But Only God can bear the weight of being God.

That is why anxiety wears us out. It takes something we rightly love and care about, then gives us a job we were never meant to do! It takes what we’ve been entrusted with: *I care; I don’t know what tomorrow brings; I cannot guarantee the future. And if we don’t stop there, ANXIETY tries to then bear the weight of God: Because I care--I therefore must control. Because I don’t know tomorrow, I*

therefore must keep imagining worst. Because I cannot guarantee the future, I therefore can never ever let my guard down!

Anxiety promises protection and delivers exhaustion. It tries to guard the heart by controlling everything.

So Paul does not simply shout up at the watchtower, “Turn off that alarm!” He tells us where to bring everything the alarm of Anxiety has been trying to guard, and that is our 2nd point.

2. Prayer Hands Back the Keys

Listen to the contrast in verse 6: *“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”*

“Anxious for Nothing. Take Everything to God.”

This is the GOOD NEWS of the GOSPEL. Paul is NOT saying “there is nothing in your life capable of making you anxious. He is saying no anxious thought has to remain shut away inside you, because every one of those anxious thoughts can be brought to God.

WHEN WE’RE OVERCOME WITH ANXIOUS THOUGHTS // FEARS AND WORRIES WILL MULTIPLY. // *When Something that might be terrible is approaching. // When Everything is falling apart. // When you do not believe you’ll be able to handle the news // When you feel already defeated.*

CAPTURE THESE THINGS! PULL THE ANXIOUS THOUGHTS out into the OPEN and lay these things before **THE LORD. IN DOING THIS, we’re HANDING THE KEYS BACK TO THE KING!** That’s what we do with **PRAYER**: all forms of our FEAR, WORRY, and STRESS, LAY them all out before GOD THEN, name each and every one of these things in PRAYER:

Father, here is what I see. Here is what I am afraid will happen. Here is what I want to happen. Here is what I cannot control. And here is what I am asking You to do.

This is what Paul teaches us to do: in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (v.6)

ALL OF the fear, the worry, and the anxiety that is holding our thoughts hostage, that is keeping us in the DOOM LOOP, is set before the Only One who can hold us, even when—especially when--the person we love MUST FACE that danger, or the situation we care about DOES fall apart.

Then notice the small sentence at the end of verse 5: *“The Lord is at hand.”* The Lord is near. Paul does not give anxious people like us a technique; he announces a Presence. We pray—we lay out all of these things before our Lord, because the Lord is ready! He is at hand! The LORD IS near.

So here is a prayer you can use when the alarm sounds — before the appointment, in bed when sleep will not come, or in the quiet before you open your email.

Father, this is what I fear. (Prayer)

This is what I want, but I cannot control the outcome. (Turn over the keys)

This is what I am asking You to do. (Supplication)

This is what I can thank You for today. (Thanksgiving)

The outcome belongs to You. (Surrender)

Show me my next faithful step. (Service)

This is surrender.

The Warden of the Gate does not abandon the keys. He places them into the hands of the one to whom they belong.

In our first point we saw that, when a threat is detected, we sound the alarm, but try to KEEP THE KEYS, to CONTROL THE OUTCOME, and that’s often when our Anxious Thoughts can consume and exhaust us. Then our second point, WE GIVE THE KEYS BACK TO OUR KING, that is, we Place everything before God in Prayer, naming each fear, worry, and anxious thought, and stress.

The third point from our text is that now, GOD’S PEACE TAKES UP ITS POST!



3. Peace Takes Up Its Post

Verse 7 is a promise: *“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

[Slide: Peace Warrior] Notice in this verse who is doing the guarding. Paul does not say, *“You will guard your own heart by becoming very good at peaceful thinking.”* He says the Peace of God **will guard**.

Looking at GOD’S PEACE, the action verb Paul uses when he wrote this verse originally is the GREEK word, **Phroureōsei** (*frow-RAY-say*)— *it’s* a soldier’s word. It means to garrison, to stand sentry, to hold a post. Paul is writing this while chained to a Roman guard.

Rome thinks it is guarding Paul. But Paul says God will station His peace at the gates of our inner life, our spiritual life.

GOD’S PEACE is promised here. // Not THEORETICAL PEACE, BUT GOD’S OWN VERY REAL PEACE, will be stationed BY GOD, to stand SENTRY over YOUR HEART!

Paul is proclaiming the promise of GOD, indeed the promise of JESUS, that HIS Peace will COME and will STAND GUARD over your life. HIS PEACE will start GUARDING US: **BEFORE our desperate circumstances change. //** The PEACE OF CHRIST GUARDING US **WHEN what we fear most DOES happen.** ... AND THAT TRUTH may be hard for some of us to hear this morning.

PAUL understands that, and so he is CLEAR TO POINT OUT that GOD’S PEACE is a PEACE that *“surpasses all understanding.”*

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (v.7)

Paul is not telling us that because THE PEACE OF CHRIST IS STANDING GUARD, the BAD NEWS will be averted, the danger will not approach, or what we fear is not a real threat, or that the outcome we want most will be the one we are delivered.

What both Paul and Jesus affirm to us is that we are GIVEN SOMETHING THAT IS A POSSESSION OF GOD—HIS PEACE. PEACE: *“in Christ Jesus.”*

SO NO MATTER WHAT WE ENDURE, The SAFEST place WE CAN REMAIN IS NOT A circumstance; it is a Person. Christ Himself is our security.

Jesus promises to us in John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you" [Standing Guard] "my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you."

So Christian peace is not a fragile hope that life will go our way. It is resurrection confidence: sin has been judged, death has been broken, and Christ is alive.

Your future may hold things for you that you would never choose. But that future cannot hold any place where Christ and His Peace is absent from you.

Anxiety tried to guard your heart by controlling everything. You placed everything before God. Now the peace of God takes up its post. Finally . . .

4. The God of Peace Walks the Road

But what about tomorrow, when the alarm goes off again?

Paul never promises that anxious feelings will not return.

Anxiety turns possibility into prophecy: *It could happen, so it probably will. I feel unsafe, so I must be unsafe.* Paul calls the mind back to reality under God. The question is not, "*Can I imagine something frightening?*" At two in the morning, we can all imagine almost anything. The question is, "*What is true?*"

What is true right now? The Lord is near. Your life is not held together by the strength of your grip.

Verse 9 moves us to action: "*What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - practice these things.*" (v.9) Peace is not only something we ask for in a crisis.

We usually assume the order runs one way: first I feel peaceful, then I can act faithfully. Paul keeps reversing it. Practice does not earn God's presence. It simply puts our feet on the road where His presence is known.

Paul offers himself as the lesson. He cannot control Rome, but he can pray. He cannot secure his release, but he can serve. He does not know whether he will live

or die, but he can rejoice. He does not say, *“Admire my peace.”* He says, *“Practice the life you have seen.”*

So when the alarm sounds, recognize it without obeying it. Name the fear. Turn it into a request and give that to GOD in prayer. Give thanks for grace already given. Bring your attention back to what is true.

Then ask, *What is my next faithful step?*

Maybe it is making the call, apologizing, seeing the doctor. Faith does not ask you to solve the next ten years before breakfast. It asks for the next step and leaves the outcome with God.

Then comes the greater promise. Verse 7 says the PEACE OF GOD will guard you; verse 9 says the GOD OF PEACE will be with you.

Conclusion — Returning the Keys

Come back to the Tower one more time. The warder does not neglect his post. He walks the route. He closes the gates. He turns the locks. He finishes the work entrusted to him. And then he hands the keys back. They were the King's Keys the whole time.

Prayer is our own ceremony of the keys: Father, this child is Yours. This marriage is Yours. This situation is Yours. This body of mine is Yours. This church is Yours. This future is Yours. Show me the work that belongs to me today, and I will return to you the worry and fear I've been carrying to guarantee an outcome that has always belonged to You.

Come morning, the alarm is no longer running the city. People can live again —
YOU CAN LIVE AGAIN.

Maybe anxiety has stood watch in your life for many years. Maybe it has told you: *If you stop worrying, who else is going to be there to stop life from falling apart. If I let go, who will be there to help me hold on.*

But Paul says: the Lord is near.

Nothing has to remain only an anxiety. **Everything can become a prayer. The** peace of God will stand guard, and the God of peace will walk with you.

You do not have to secure the future or keep everyone safe by staying afraid, living in fear, or worrying about tomorrows you cannot guarantee.

Bring everything to God.

Let peace take the watch.

Then take the next faithful step, with the God of peace beside you.

Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, this is what we fear. This is what we want. This is what we cannot control. This is what we ask You to do. Thank You for the grace You have already given. We release the outcome to You. Let Your peace take the watch over our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus. Show us the next faithful step, and walk it with us, O God of peace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.