

**Sermon – Peace of Heart and Mind**  
**Sunday December 15, 2024**

This summer, our family went on a vacation to Europe. We enjoyed a great time without incident – that is until our last day. While our family was preparing to board a crowded train, a woman with a stroller stood against the door blocking us from getting through. Then another woman came in and blocked the other side as well.

The crowds couldn't get through. And with all the pushing and shoving, my father-in-law fell down. I went to help him up; and afterwards approached the woman and told her to move aside so people could get through.

I was still annoyed by all this when I sat down with Jo and told her what happened. Then, about 15 minutes later, our tour guide came by our train with a wallet in her hand. She said, I saw this on the floor and picked it up. Does it belong to any of you?

I didn't think it was my wallet but it did look familiar. So I took it and when I opened it, I realized it was my wallet but all the cash was gone. That's when I realized, these two women weren't just obnoxious commuters. They were thieves working together to steal money.

If you've ever been robbed, you know the feeling of vulnerability and loss at having something taken from you.

Today, we're going to talk about another kind of thief. And the name of this thief is Anxiety. But anxiety isn't after your money. What anxiety is after is far more important than that.

*Anxiety steals your thoughts.*

One researcher noted that 85% of the things we worry about never happen. And of the 15% that do, 80% of people find that they can deal with the problem better than they thought they could. The researcher then concluded that 97% of your worries are just fearful thoughts based on exaggeration and misconceptions.

*Anxiety steals your health.*

When you get anxious, your brain tells your body to go into "fight or flight" mode. Your body then responds by releasing adrenaline, heightening your senses and pumping more blood. This is helpful when you're facing a real threat, but if you're constantly living in this state, you're at high risk of heart disease, ulcers and mental health disorders.

*Anxiety steals your joy.*

When your mind is fixed and consumed with what-if scenarios you can't control, anxiety steals your joy, your peace and your confidence. How many of you know what I'm talking about? You become more fearful and irritable. You become less loving and less patient.

Anxiety is a thief that steals your thoughts, your health and your joy. What are you anxious about right now?

- Maybe you're a young person. You're worried about whether you'll ever afford a home, be in a relationship or make it in life.
- Maybe you're worried about your family. Your kids are struggling, your parents are aging and you never have time for yourself.
- Maybe you're worried about work. You have a demanding workload, tight deadlines and high pressure.
- Maybe you're worried about your health, your finances or your relationships.

Anxiety has become perhaps the greatest struggle of our time. It's reached levels we've never seen before.

- It's the most common mental disorder in the world.
- 40% of people report feeling more anxious since the pandemic.
- Anxiety rates among teenagers has tripled over the last decade.

So how do you overcome anxiety? How can you experience the peace God designed you for?

We're in our Advent series called Prince of Peace. This Christmas season, we're celebrating the birth of Jesus and reflecting on how through Jesus - God brings his restoring peace into this world and into our lives.

Today we're going to look at two of the most powerful verses in the Bible on anxiety. These verses show us how we can replace our anxiety with God's peace. Please turn with me in your Bible or Bible App to our passage today Philippians 4:6-7.

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)**

Paul is writing this letter from prison. He's been arrested and is facing trial for stirring up opposition against the authorities. He's awaiting his sentence and knows he could very well die. And yet, what does Paul so urgently want us to tell us?

Don't be anxious about anything...

Turn to your neighbour and say, Don't be anxious.

The word anxious is also translated worry, concern and care. In the original Greek, it's the word *merimnao*. It's made up of two words: *merizo* which means to divide and *nous* when means the mind. In other words, anxiety divides the mind by pulling you in different directions. Isn't this a perfect definition for anxiety?

This same word is used in the story of Mary and Martha. Mary is mindful and attentive to Jesus. While Martha is worried and distracted by her responsibilities.

So what does Jesus tell her?

Martha, Martha, you are worried/anxious/divided by many things, but only one is needed.

How many of you feeling divided this morning? Like your thoughts are pulling you in different directions? You're here right now in body but your mind is somewhere else. Because what you're thinking about is:

- All the things you need to do.
- All the people you need to take care of.
- All the problems you need to fix.

And even as you think about these things, more thoughts come flooding in like:

- What if something bad happens?
- What if I let people down?
- What if I'm not good enough?

Why? Because anxiety is a thief that will steal your thoughts, your health and your joy. That's why Paul says, Don't be anxious about anything. But how do we do that? What I want to do today is look at three ways Paul shows us to replace our anxiety with God's peace.

First, he tells us to **Pray**.

Now when does Paul say you should pray? Only when you face really big problems? Only when you've tried everything else?

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer... (Philippians 4:6)**

Paul says, pray in every situation. When you're faced with a problem, how many of you feel like your first instinct is to figure it out on your own first? I know I'm often guilty of this.

But **Prayer isn't meant to be your last resort, it's meant to be your first response.** God invites you to come to him in prayer first. He wants you to bring him your worries, your fears and your problems. He wants you to bring him things that are big. He wants you to bring him things that are small.

One commentator says, There is nothing too great for God's power; and nothing too small for his fatherly care.

The Apostle Peter says, **Cast your cares on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)**

When you feel anxious, do you come to God in prayer first? Prayer isn't meant to be your last resort, it's meant to be your first response.

But what does it actually mean to pray?

There are different types of prayer in the Bible. In fact, we'll be looking at two other types later on. But the word Paul uses for prayer here is the Greek word *proseuche*. *Proseuche* is a general word that means to worship.

So how do you worship? You simply turn your heart toward God and acknowledge his greatness. That's what prayer does – it shifts your focus.

Anxiety makes you focus on your problems, but prayer focuses on the One who is bigger than your problems. Anxiety makes you focus on the mountains, but prayer focuses on the Mountain Mover.

One of my favourite movies is *The Bear*. There's a powerful moment when a young bear cub is being chased by a fierce cougar that's been hunting him throughout the movie. He desperately runs through the forest, climbs up a tree and falls into the river. He floats down the river and at this point we think he's finally safe! But the relentless cougar tracks him down and eventually corners him.

He swipes his razor sharp claws at the bear cub causing a great wound. And he's about to strike the fatal blow. But in a final act of desperation and defiance, the bear cub holds its ground and lets out a weak and pathetic wail that's meant to scare the cougar away.

Surprisingly, the cougar is suddenly filled with terror. Despite the bear cub being much smaller and weaker, it bows its head, turns around and retreats. What just happened? The camera now shifts its focus.

And it's now that we see that the bear cub isn't alone. Because standing behind it, unbeknownst to the bear cub, is the massive figure of the adult bear who's been the cub's strength and protector, standing on its hind legs ready to fight the cougar.

How many of you feel like that vulnerable bear cub right now? You've been running from your fears but your problems have hunted you down.

- Maybe it's a health concern, a financial struggle or a challenging family dynamic.
- Maybe it's a relationship problem, a work deadline or a wound from the past.

You've been running for years. You're desperate, exhausted and losing hope. What do you do?

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation... you pray and shift your focus.

- Instead of focusing on your fears, you focus on God's strength.
- Instead of focusing on your problems, you focus on the One who is bigger than your problems.
- Instead of focusing on the mountains, you focus on the Mountain Mover.

Turn to your neighbour and say, Shift your focus!

Because do you know what happens when you shift your focus? Your fears turn around and retreat. Not because of your own strength. Not because of your own power. But because standing behind you is a God who is mighty and able and he's ready to fight for you.

The prophet Isaiah says:

**Don't be afraid, for I am with you.**

**Don't be discouraged, for I am your God.**

**I will strengthen you and help you.**

**I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)**

So pray and shift your focus.

The second way to replace anxiety with God's peace is to **Give thanks**.

How many of you are feeling stressed from at least one of these things? The demands of school, pressures from work, strain in your marriage or challenges in parenting. Here's something to think

about. Isn't it interesting that the same thing that is causing you anxiety is the same thing you once wanted? Think about it. What was once a blessing now feels like a burden?

What happened? We forgot God's goodness, we forgot his presence, we forgot his purpose. In other words, we lost perspective. So how do we regain our perspective? We give thanks.

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation... with thanksgiving... (Phil 4:6)**

Even though Paul wrote this letter from prison while awaiting his sentence, how does he begin his letter? He doesn't begin by complaining about his circumstances. He doesn't begin by blaming others. How does he begin his letter? With thanksgiving.

Paul begins his letter by giving thanks for God's faithfulness. He gives thanks for the people and their partnership in the gospel. He gives thanks for the privilege of serving God.

And what does thanksgiving do? It changes his perspective. He sees that even though he's in chains, God is still faithful. God is still with him. And God still has a purpose for him. He sees that his chains have actually given him the opportunity to share the gospel with the whole palace guard. He literally has a captive audience! Not only that, but his example has inspired other Christians to boldly share their faith as well.

Giving thanks doesn't change our circumstances but it does change our perspective. It reminds us that God is good. It reminds us that God is with us. It reminds us that God is still working out his purpose even in our difficult times. In fact, he's working in your situation right now to...

- Refine your character.
- Build your faith.
- Teach you to depend on him.

That's why David often begins his prayers with thanksgiving.

**Let all that I am praise the LORD;**

**with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.**

<sup>2</sup> **Let all that I am praise the LORD;**

**may I never forget the good things he does for me.**

<sup>3</sup> **He forgives all my sins**

**and heals all my diseases.**

<sup>4</sup> **He redeems me from death**

**and crowns me with love and tender mercies.**

<sup>5</sup> **He fills my life with good things.**

**My youth is renewed like the eagle's! (Psalm 103:1-5)**

How might God be working in your life right now? When you give thanks, it will change your perspective.

The third way to replace anxiety with God's peace is to **Tell God what you need.**

There's an interesting story in Mark 10. A blind man named Bartimaeus hears that Jesus has come and begins shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The people tell him to be quiet, but Jesus tells them to bring him over. Then he asks him an odd question:

What do you want me to do for you? The blind man answers, I want to see. And then Jesus instantly heals him.

But why does Jesus even have to ask the blind man what he wants? Isn't it obvious? He's blind so he wants to see. But when you think about it, it's actually not that obvious.

Because how many times have you had a need, but instead of telling God you chose instead to wallow in self-pity, or dwell on negative thoughts or isolate yourself from others.

It's like when you go to a restaurant, do you find a table and just complain about how hungry you are? Or when the waiter comes, do you say, Just take away my hunger? Do you do that? Of course not!

What do you do? You tell the waiter what you want...

*I'll take a shawarma plate with double potatoes instead of rice, tabbouleh instead of regular salad and extra garlic sauce on the side please. You tell them what you want.*

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation... present your requests to God (Philippians 4:6)**

Paul says, Tell God what you need. James says: **...you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. (James 4:2)**

So ask God for what you need. If Jesus were to ask you, What do you want me to do for you? What would you say?

I'm going to give you a space to respond to that. I'd like to ask you to close your eyes and imagine Jesus asking you, What do you want me to do? What do you want to tell him?

Take a moment now to respond.

[Time of silence]

Maybe you're asking for healing for a loved one, or for wisdom for a tough decision or for financial provision for a need.

You can open your eyes now.

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)**

How do you overcome your anxiety? You Pray, Give Thanks and Tell God what you need. And when you do that, your circumstances will instantly get better – right?

God often answers our prayers. He often does make our circumstances better. But he doesn't promise to do that. Because sometimes even after we pray, loved ones are still sick, finances are still tight and problems are still there.

God doesn't promise to improve our circumstances but he does promise this.

**<sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)**

You see, **Biblical peace isn't the absence of problems; it's the presence of Jesus.** It's a peace that passes understanding because it transcends your circumstances, your anxieties and your fears.

This peace isn't a warm fuzzy feeling. It's not a temporary fix to your problems. This peace is a deep and abiding assurance that comes from knowing that:

- Even when your fears have been hunting you down,
- Even when you feel like they're too powerful to overcome,
- Even when you're exhausted and ready to give up...

You have a God who is standing behind you, defending you, protecting you and fighting for you. His peace will guard your heart and mind, even in the hardest of times.

The gospel writer Luke writes:

**Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."**

**<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,**

**<sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:11-14)**

This Christmas, we celebrate Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Who came not only to give us peace but who is our peace.

Jesus said, 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. (John 14:27)

Let's pray.

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father,

We come before you and we cast our cares on you. We give you our burdens, our challenges and our fears. Help us to shift our focus from our anxiety and instead focus on you, the great Mountain Mover, the Prince of Peace, our Saviour and our friend.

Guard our hearts and minds with Your peace and fill us with Your presence as we walk with you through the challenges of this season knowing that no matter what storm we're facing, you are in the boat with us. And you calm not only the storm in the sea but the storms in our heart.

Jesus, be our peace now and forever more. In your name.

Amen.

**Benediction**

As you go into your week, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus as you remember that the great Mountain Mover is with you, protecting you, defending you and fighting for you. Go now in peace!