

# Do Not Be Afraid . . . Peace Has a Pathway! (Part 1)

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## Introduction

- A. So we press on this morning in our Do Not Be Afraid . . . series where, again, you remember each week we are dropping into one of the countless places in Scripture where God, in one way or another, encourages His people to not be afraid.
- B. Well, this morning we come to one of the more famous instances of this sort of command—and I imagine it's probably one that's already been giving you help and encouragement personally in recent days. It's found in [Phil 4:4-9](#).

## The Text

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness [Gk. *epieikes* = "gentleness"] be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. ([Phil 4:4-9](#))

## Moving from Anxiety to Peace

- A. You see the directive come to us there in [v. 6](#), don't you? "Do not be anxious . . ." It's a close cousin to the command "Do not be afraid . . ."—and the two really are, at bottom, one and the same idea. "Do not be anxious . . .," Paul says.
- B. And, of course, we know, the opposite of anxiety, as Paul makes clear here, is this idea of peace. And if we look more closely at our text, what we notice is that Paul, and God, clearly want to help us move from a place of anxiety to a place of peace. Though anxiety stands in the background, peace is clearly the focus and goal.
  - 1. I think this is signaled to by the fact that it shows up twice in our text—each time it's at the end of a paragraph, and each time it is situated, it would seem to me, at the climax point of Paul's logical progression. He gives us some things to do and says it will bring peace. Then he tells us some more things to do and says it will bring peace.
    - a. So in [v. 7](#), he writes: [And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.](#)
    - b. And then again, down in the latter part of [v. 9](#) he concludes: [and the God of peace will be with you.](#)

- C. It is peace that is the issue here. He wants us to find this peace even in the midst of anxious times. And I think, if we look carefully, what he gives us in the discussion that surrounds these two verses is actually a sort of pathway towards it.
1. He lays out steps, as it were, steps that we can take even today as a way of moving into it. He is showing us the way from anxiety and fear and worry . . . to peace.
    - a. That’s the reason for the title of the sermon this morning: “Do Not Be Afraid . . . Peace Has a Pathway!”
- D. Now, who hasn’t been dealing with a bit more anxiety than normal lately? Who wouldn’t love to find peace in the midst of this pandemic with all of its disruptive and life-altering implications? Anyone feeling afraid? Anyone longing for a bit more peace?!
1. I think sometimes we can feel like we’re just helpless victims of our anxieties, like there’s nothing we can do about them or with them, but just kind of sit around and wait for them to pass.
    - a. And what’s more, our anxieties tend, by virtue of their very nature, to overwhelm, confuse, and disorient us. Even if there were things we could do, we wouldn’t know where to begin, what’s up or down, left or right. It’s all a twisted up mess in our hearts and minds. That’s what anxiety is.
      - i. I think of the picture on the cover of Ed Welch’s book on anxiety I’ve been referencing entitled **Running Scared**. It’s a picture of a guy running, but it’s as if someone took a marker to the photo and over top his head there’s just all these black scribbles and things so you can’t even see his face. It’s a picture of what’s happening in his mind. That’s what anxiety feels like. I’m just in this sort of crazy, tangled up darkness. I’m not thinking straight, feeling straight, seeing straight.
- E. Well, I think that’s why a text like this is so helpful to us in these times. Paul lays out a path here. There are clear steps we can take.
1. And I see three of them. I’m going to bring out the first one and half this morning and we’ll come back after Easter and finish up the rest. But let me give them all to you up front: (1) Step #1: Pray (esp. v. 6); (2) Step #2: Ponder (esp. v. 8); and (3) Step #3: Practice (esp. v. 9).
    - a. We’ll look at these one by one and then we’ll come out at the end next time with a final consideration of this idea of peace.

→ Pause and consider the question(s) under Pause Point #1

## (1) Step #1: Pray (esp. v. 6)

- A. This first step comes immediately off the command to not be anxious. Look back at v. 6: “[D]o not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”
- B. Now, there are two observations I want to make at this point. The first is derived more just from experience in general; the second is drawn out from this text in particular.

## Observation #1: We Are Always Talking

- A. I have mentioned before that—internally at least, in our minds and in our hearts—we are always talking.
  - 1. We are thinking about this, considering that, reflecting on yesterday, planning for tomorrow, and so on. In this sense, we are always talking. There’s this sort of ongoing monologue we’re engaged in throughout the day.
    - a. And what we find is that this monologue trends towards anxiety. It starts to create this sort of feedback loop in us, where the shrillness of our thoughts get louder, and we feel noisy inside.
- B. We’re busy talking within ourselves, to ourselves, about ourselves . . . and we very easily end up caving in on ourselves:
  - 1. What should I do if this happens? What should I do if that happens?
  - 2. Why did the boss look at me that way this morning? Am I the next one on the chopping block?
  - 3. Why does my spouse seem so distant? Did I do something wrong?
  - 4. What is up with my kids? I’m a horrible mother. I see how well behaved the other kids are at school and church. Why can’t I seem to make that happen? What’s the matter with me?
  - 5. Speaking of school, I can’t believe it’s called off for the year! How am I going to survive? I thought I could manage this for a few weeks, but months?
  - 6. Where did I put my keys? How come I’m always losing stuff? Am I getting Alzheimer’s? My mother had it. Maybe I’m getting it too.
  - 7. What if there was COVID-19 on those groceries I just brought in? I know they’re saying now we should disinfect every item and things, but I was just too tired. Am I going to get my whole family infected? Am I already infected? I forgot to wear my mask when I went out.
  - 8. How long is this going to go on? What day is it? I don’t even know anymore.
    - a. And it just keeps going, sometimes without us even realizing it’s happening. Sound familiar?
- C. This is why, by the way, back when I did a few sermons on what I call the Sacred Path, I encouraged us to attempt the spiritual discipline of Silence at the outset of our times with the Lord in His Word and in prayer.
  - 1. We don’t realize how much we are talking until we actually try to be quiet—not just externally, of course, but internally, in the heart and mind. As you try to quiet down, you start to tune into this, what I would call, frequency of fret.

- a. Our anxieties are always abuzz with conversation. And they just have this horrible tendency of spinning inward on themselves, of creating that feedback loop, and we can get sucked into the spiral.
- D. I give Levi baths and he's scared of that moment when you pull the plug because it creates what he calls a tornado—that cyclone thing of water that circles and sucks down the drain. And he's scared it's going to get ahold of his ankles and pull him down with it.
- 1. Well, our anxieties can be like that. And, in this case, it seems to me, we really can get caught and sucked down into it.
    - a. So what do we do?! Once we start to tune into this frequency of fret, what do we do next if we want to move towards the peace of God?

## Observation #2: We Can and Should Be Always Talking with God

### Turning the Inner Monologue to Dialogue

- A. Well, here we come to Paul's remedy there in [v. 6](#) and the second observation I want to make: namely, that We Can and Should Be Always Talking with God.
- 1. The only way to break the cycle and spinout is to turn the conversation outward and away from ourselves towards God.
- B. Look at [v. 6](#) again:
- 1. [“Do not be anxious about anything . . .”](#) Let that land on you for a moment. Anything?! Seriously?! How in the world are we supposed to do that? What's the remedy, Paul? What am I supposed to do with this inner monologue that's always spinning in my heart and mind?
  - 2. Answer: [“. . . but in everything by prayer and supplication . . . let your requests be made known to God.”](#) In other words: Talk to God about it. Turn the inner monologue to dialogue with your Creator. He's here. He cares. He can help.
    - a. Note in this verse the correlation between the words [“anything”](#) and [“everything.”](#) The connection is profound. How are we able to not anxious about anything? Well, we commit ourselves talk to God about everything!

### Talking to God about “Everything”

- A. And this is so important. Because I think a lot of times we forget that God doesn't just put up with this kind of anxious conversation, He invites it. If we're not careful, we can jump straight to [v. 8](#) and think that's the way to peace.

1. God doesn't want to hear us whining and complaining and struggling. Real Christians don't act like that. Suck it up. Set your mind on what is true and be done with it. Think happy thoughts and, in time, your heart will follow suit.
- B. You get around enough Christians that make this kind of error and soon you all grow really skilled at being fake. Any discussion of having a hard time is seen as a lack of faith and you are quickly rebuked and given what I'd call a Bible Band-aid. "Here, this will fix it. Rom 8:28. Now get over it." They cover the wound, but it's still festering underneath.
1. You learn to smile wide while breaking down inside.
  2. You learn to raise your hands in worship, when you really want to be down in a heap on the floor.
  3. You learn how to talk the Christian talk and dance around the deep struggles and anxieties of your heart.
    - a. It's a horrible thing. And, hear me: it's an unbiblical thing!
- C. Hear this: God, in our text, is inviting us, even commanding us, to talk to Him about everything that worries us. Everything. This is an essential step on the pathway to peace. You have to truly name what you're feeling, process it, get it out—but do it with the Lord, in His presence through prayer and supplication.
1. If you need another verse to drive this home because, as Moses says, a charge can only be established on the basis of at least two witnesses, well, let me give you another witness: [1 Pet 5:6-7](#): "<sup>6</sup>Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, <sup>7</sup>casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."
    - a. There it is again! It's not just some of your anxieties, right? He wants "[all your anxieties . . .](#)" "Burden Me with your burdens," God says. That's an amazing thing!
- D. Listen: God does not condemn you for being anxious. He knows you will be. His main concern in all of this is not whether or not you are anxious but where you go when you are. That's a critical distinction.
1. Ed Welch writes wonderfully on this point: "[Is it wrong to be afraid? Is it sinful? Maybe, but put these questions on hold. The emphasis in Scripture is, 'When I am afraid, I will trust in you' \(Ps. 56:3\). The issue isn't so much whether or not we are afraid and worry. Scripture assumes that we will be afraid and anxious at time. What is important is where we turn or to whom we turn when we are afraid](#)" (Running Scared, p. 63).
    - a. Ironically, when we stiffen our upper lip and act like we don't need God's help because we don't want to bother Him or offend Him with our anxieties or whatever, it's this sort of behavior that bothers and offends Him the most!
      - i. He doesn't want you acting like an orphan and fending for yourself when you have a heavenly Father who cares about whatever it is you care about.

Lament and Thanksgiving!

- A. NT Wright, in a recent and controversial article for Time magazine, writes about the importance of the biblical category of lament in times like the one our nation and world is facing now.
1. I will say, I agree with many of the critiques that have come out in response to this article, but, in my opinion, Wright does get at least one very important thing, well, right.
    - a. He reminds us that it's okay to not be okay and that we must come to God with that just as we are—tears, anxieties, doubts and all.
- B. To support his case, he brings up the Psalms where this idea is modeled for us time and again. He references:
1. [Psa 6:2: "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled."](#)
  2. [Psa 10:1: "Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"](#)
  3. [Psa 13:1: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?"](#)
  4. [Psa 22:1](#), which even Jesus Himself quotes from the cross: ["My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"](#)
    - a. And, of course, this is just a sampling of countless examples. But we get the idea.
      - i. And here's the thing to note: These men are not rebuked for approaching God in their anxieties and talking to Him about them. No! Rather they are held up as examples to us of what the faithful do as a first step towards peace. They lament! They air out their anxieties in the presence of a God who hears them and cares for them. They struggle in prayer with God towards God.
- C. Now, the problem with Wright's article, as has been pointed out, is that he leaves us in this place of lament. He never moves on towards step two on our pathway to peace, as it were. Indeed, it would seem he questions whether we really can or should.
1. His whole article ends on this note of uncertainty, as if we can't really know what God is doing in our suffering, let alone if He is actually in control of it and up to good in it. All we can do is just kind of come to Him and cry. The title of his article really says it all: ["Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It's Not Supposed To."](#)
- D. But this is certainly, and emphatically, not the sort of place Paul leaves us in our text here. There is nothing unclear or ambiguous about the apostle's words to us. Even in the midst of our anxieties and lamenting, we have great reason to hope.
1. This why, by the way, even in this opening call to pray and talk to God about our anxieties, Paul surprisingly, even stunningly, brings in this idea of gratitude. Did you notice it? ["\[D\]o not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" \(v. 6\).](#)

- a. The clear implication here is that even in the face of our panic and doubt and fret, God is up to good, there are things to give Him thanks for, and He will soon begin to help us see them more clearly and set our minds upon them more securely.
  - i. And this, of course, is where we are headed next . . .

→ Pause and consider the question(s) under Pause Point #2

## (2) Step #2: Ponder (esp. v. 8)

### Lamenting and Listening

- A. Now we come to that which is brought out for us in v. 8 in particular: “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.”
- B. I should point out here first that I do think there is a way to approach prayer that can actually make us more anxious. And I think that’s when we pray just to be heard rather than also to hear. Do you know what I mean?
  - 1. If we approach prayer merely as a way of getting God to hear us and do our bidding, if we think of it merely as a time to vent or give Him a piece of our mind, and we are content to let it just stop there . . . our anxieties and things will actually get worse. That’s still not turning the monologue to dialogue is it. You’re still just sounding off, only now in God’s direction.
- C. On the other hand, if we approach prayer, not just to be heard by God, but also with a desire and an openness to hear from God as well . . . that’s when it all changes. We let our concerns be known, for sure, but we also say in and through it all: “God I want to know what’s on Your heart in this. Realign me. Help me. Speak to me.”
  - 1. That’s when He begins to shift our minds to these things Paul identifies here: those things that are true and honorable and just and pure and lovely and commendable and excellent and worthy of praise.
    - a. He begins to calm the spit and foam of our hearts and leads us to sturdier realities, to things we can actually anchor our souls to. He cuts through the frequency of fret, as it were, and tunes us into that of His word and work.
      - i. We Pray and then we Ponder—we meditate, we come think deeply about the things of God. This is the second step along the pathway to peace.
- D. If ever there was a time when we needed this most, when we need to set our minds firmly upon the sturdier realities of God, it would be now, right? I mean, aren’t we tempted perhaps more than ever

to just let our anxieties run loose and let our minds settle down into all manner of what-ifs and frightening prospects?

1. You can be just fine, and then you turn on the evening news, and if you're not processing that with the Lord in prayer, you're immediately left feeling like life, at least as you knew it, is over. And it just spirals down from there.
  - a. And God would say: "Listen, don't deny what you're feeling, don't pretend you're all good, come to me with it, talk to me about it, and then let me show you where I am in it, let me show you who I am, what I've said, what I've done, what I'm doing. Let me lead you to these sturdier realities."

## Sturdy Realities

- A. So what might some of these sturdier realities be? When Paul says to think about these sorts of things, what might he be referring to?
  1. Well, while the answer could probably go in any number of directions, I thought the clearest and most likely answer is that he's probably thinking of stuff he's just been writing to the Philippian church about.
    - a. This exhortation in [Phil 4](#), remember, comes at the tail end of a letter where he's just finished expounding on all kinds of realities that are [true](#) and [just](#) and [lovely](#) and so on.
- B. So let's go there for a moment. On the whole I'm going to draw out three of these sturdy realities upon which God might have you set your mind even in the midst of all this Coronavirus stuff. This morning I'm going to just give you the first one.

## Sturdy Reality #1: Sovereign Grace

- A. This idea, while all over the epistle, comes out most clearly for us in [Phil 1](#) where Paul writes this: "<sup>6</sup> I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.<sup>7a</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace . . ." (vv. 6–7a).
- B. Did you hear it? Listen, the Philippian church was experiencing at this time some sense of opposition.
  1. That's what we clearly gather from [Phil 1:27-30](#)—where Paul speaks of their temptation to be afraid in the face of conflict with opponents and persecution. And he notes the fact that they are suffering for Christ's sake.
    - a. So we know that, in some ways like us, they are dealing with tough circumstances. It's hard.
- C. And Paul knows that, in times like these, they could definitely choose set their mind on far more dishonorable things, right?



1. Things like: “It’s clear. God has abandoned us. I guess we’re left now to fend for ourselves. A loving God wouldn’t let us suffer like this. Whatever Paul was talking about when he first made his way through our city—about a God who is gracious and kind and gave His Son to adopt us and things—surely that was just a sham. We ‘came to Jesus’ and our life just got worse.”
- D. And Paul is pushing back on this here saying: “It’s okay to feel some of these things. We all will from time to time. But don’t let your mind settle in there. Take what you’re feeling and talk to God about it. And, as you pour out your heart and your anxieties, I have no doubt that God will meet you in that place and draw your mind to firmer realities—to what is true and honorable and worthy of praise. Though you may feel as if God has left you, here’s the truth: God has set His hand on you in sovereign grace and He will finish the good work He’s begun!”
1. If you anchored your soul onto that reality during this pandemic brothers and sisters, how would that change things for you? What would that do to your anxiety? Would that not serve as a significant step towards peace?

→ Pause and consider the question(s) under Pause Point #3