

Sermon Title: The Innoculation For Anxiety
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:7-9 (Philippians #14)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-23-11

Today I will take the first step in fulfilling a promise, because last Sunday it was my joy to preach at the church in Kirsanov, one of the partner churches in Russia—one of the most alive of all of them; some really wonderful things going on there. And I preached to *them* the last sermon I had preached to *you* in Philippians Chapter 4: "The Cure For Anxiety" when it attack you in that moment. And I said if we had time, we would go on and do the next part of it, and Pastor Anatoly made me promise to come back and do that. So I prepared for it, and I think I will share it with you first. Actually, I don't know when or if I will get back there, but it is God's next passage for us in Philippians Chapter 4, as we near the end of this wonderful and practical little book.

You know, it has become a favorite pastime of our society to be preoccupied with stress and anxiety. We have built multimillion and multibillion dollar industries around helping people to live with or to overcome anxiety and stress.

Anxiety is one of those things that our world has worked hard to redefine. Have you noticed the trend?

A generation ago, "drunkenness" used to be a *sin*. People who get drunk used to be "drunkards." And *now*, "alcoholism" is a "disease"—and so, its cure is not repentance and regeneration and a new life; its cure is medical and psychological treatment. And getting drunk is now recreation, not so much a shameful thing.

Sex outside of marriage used to be a sin. Now, we say it is as inevitable as acne for teenagers—and so, we *promote* it by passing out condoms and talking about it all the time. In Russia I asked, "How is dating among the teenage kids in Russia?" And Anya gave me a pretty straightforward answer: She said, "A guy meets a girl. They have sex, and then they say they are dating." That's just "normal," supposedly.

Theft and arson—they used to be *sins*. Now, they are the results of racism and poverty sometimes; but other times, they are the best way to celebrate your team's victory in the big game, or the best way to show your frustration when you disagree with a jury verdict.

Well, "anxiety" is getting redefined, too. It's another example of our world's quest to redefine things such that spiritual implications are swept aside (Prov. 14:9).

Three times in Matthew Chapter 6, Verses 25 through 34—which we are not going to study, but I am going to refer to it—Jesus gives the command, in one form or another: "Do not be anxious." Here in Philippians 4, Paul gives the same command in different words.

Now, if God says *not* to do something, and you *do* it, what do we call that? It is "sin"—it's disobeying God (1 Jn. 3:4). And just like if God says to *do* something and you *refuse* to do it, it is also "sin": James 4:17—"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

So, if God says, "I *do not want* My children bogged down in anxiety," and you are bogged down in anxiety, there is a *spiritual issue* at stake!

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Anxiety is a sin because it is a manifestation of believing lies. For anxiety to be anything other than a short-term reaction to a situation (Prov. 3:25a), you have to deny who God is and what He has said.

Toward the end of that passage in Matthew 6, Jesus says, in Verse 31—"Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (vss. 31-32, NASB-1977). The reason not to be "anxious" is *theological* (Ps. 27:1; 46:1-3; 112:7; Is. 41:10; Jn. 14:1). If you *know* the truth, and you *live by* the truth, you *have* the resource for anxiety to not become spiritual flypaper for you. You can have an anxious reaction—that's normal; God built that into us. But you don't have to *wallow* in it.

The key word here is "anxious"; it is the same word in Philippians 4:6 that we were introduced to last time we were here. It is from a root that carries the idea of being drawn in different directions, or being distracted from your intended focus. And from this, we can come up with a good working definition of the sin of anxiety: Anxiety is allowing yourself to be distracted from *who* God is and what He has said, by paying improper attention to circumstances (e.g., Matt. 14:28-30).

Now, since earthly things are temporary (1 Jn. 2:17), since earthly things do not ultimately satisfy (Pr. 27:20), since yearning for earthly things blurs your spiritual vision (Mk. 4:19), and because you must choose between them and God (1 Jn. 2:15; Jas. 4:4)—therefore, don't set your heart on earthly things! (Col. 3:2) It is hard to be anxious about things that happen to you on Earth if your "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20) and you are living in light of your citizenship (Eph. 5:8). Your heavenly Father who gave you life has also promised to give you all that you need to sustain it.

Now, *everyone* is subject to anxiety; we know that (e.g., Ps. 94:19; 139:23; 2 Cor. 7:5). If anybody in the room has never been anxious, I want to talk to you; I'd like to know something about how you do that. Like "Life Savers": it is "Part of living." But to let anxiety *control your life* is unnecessary, and it is wrong.

This passage tells you God's provision for victory over anxiety. We kind of need to look at the whole thing as a unit, and so we will review a little bit:

First of all, in Verses 4 and 5: Your Testimony Is At Stake.
Then, Paul tells you that you can use the Emergency Antidote For Anxiety.
And then, in our passage for today, he tells you to Inoculate Yourself.

We saw this already in Verses 4 and 5—"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near." (NASB-1977)

Now that says, in a nutshell, that people around us can examine our ability to cope with life, and they can use what they observe in us as a basis for judging the validity of our faith. How you handle situations that make most people anxious *is* an important part of your testimony (e.g., Acts 16:22-25; Phil. 2:14-15). God *meant it* that way.

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If God is who He claims to be in His Word, if Jesus Christ His Son actually lives within you, there *will be* abundant evidence of the reality of God and the presence of Jesus Christ in your life (e.g., Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 36:27; 2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 2:13; 1 Jn. 2:4; Jas. 2:26)—and one evidence is how you handle stressful situations and circumstances.

"Forbearing spirit" translates a key word. One translation is "big-heartedness"—showing a lot of heart. It means being humble and patient and steadfast and able to handle the injustices of an upside down world, trusting in God in spite of all that (e.g., Rom. 12:14; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; Jas. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:21-23; 3:8-9; 4:19). And this passage *shamelessly says all men have the right to see in your life that you are exceptionally reasonable and gentle* and, if you will, "big-hearted" about difficult circumstances (cf. Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12). The Christian is the one who reasons that it is far better to *suffer wrong than to inflict one*; we are the ones who have a heavenly resource the world cannot understand (Jn. 14:17; Eph. 3:16).

So, the Testimony of every Christian Is At Stake by how we handle situations that would make people anxious. Then, he tells us to use the Emergency Antidote For Anxiety.

I explained last time that there are physical conditions that can affect a person emotionally; we all know that. There are medications that you may have to take for something else that can affect you emotionally. There are physical conditions that can *cause* anxiety, physical conditions that can *worsen* anxiety—and those things should be treated *physically*. I am not denying that. I certainly do not want to make someone who has a need for a medication to think that they are being sub-spiritual because they use it. But there is *always* at least a *part*—and usually, *all*—of anxiety that *you* can control. For *most* of us, it is *all* under our control by the choices that we make.

I said last time that there is an analogy between anxiety and an allergic reaction. There are a number of similarities. Anxiety is to your emotions and to your spiritual life what an allergic reaction is to your body: It is an inappropriate *overreaction*. An allergy attack is an inappropriate overproduction of histamine in your body, and it causes significant discomfort; it can be life-threatening if it is serious enough. It is a physical failure of your body to react properly to stimuli in your environment.

Anxiety is an inappropriate overproduction, not of chemicals but of *emotions* that cause you emotional discomfort. And anxiety can cripple your ability to function normally; it can cripple your ability to think clearly. It is a spiritual failure to react properly to circumstances in your life. Anxiety is the reaction that you have when you are knocked off your pins, and you at least momentarily fail to live according to the truth (Ps. 43:2, 5).

Now, there are two ways to deal with anxiety, just as there are two ways to deal with allergies. Last time, we majored on the first; today, we are going to major on the second. But I need to remind you that on the one hand, you can do something to relieve the *symptoms* when an attack occurs. This is the Emergency Antidote. On the other hand, you can take measures to *prevent* the attack in the first place; that is the Inoculation Against Anxiety. And obviously, it is better not to have to use the Emergency Antidote if you can prevent the attack in the first place.

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So, Philippians Chapter 4, Verse 6—the Emergency Antidote: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." It is a command never to be anxious—and if you *are* anxious, *stop it!* That's what the command means. It says, "If you are anxious, bring it to an end; and if you are not anxious, don't get there."

How do you do that? Well, there is a contrast there: "but in everything..." That tells us two things: Shift gears—that's the "but" part of it. *Disengage* the anxiety. *Choose to switch the direction of your thoughts and your words!* Make a choice (cf. Rom. 6:13; Gal. 5:16). "Don't be anxious, *but*"—*you*—"in everything" do this. Now, the "in everything" part of this tells you that this is a *universal* antidote; this works in *every case!* Now, it might not work *totally, immediately*, depending on how difficult the situation is. But it is *always*, in *every* circumstance, the *best* thing and the *right* thing to do to systematically, *intentionally*, by your will, *choose* to disengage from the anxiety and go somewhere else (Ps. 43:5). You *have* the power to do that! You have *in you* the power and ability to do that (Col. 1:11), *and* you have great spiritual resources that your heavenly Father wants you to put into use (Eph. 6:10).

The Antidote for Anxiety won't work if you won't take the medicine; or if, when you take the medicine, your view of God is deficient so that your prayers accomplish nothing—because he said: "let your requests be made known to God." That is the Antidote! There's no one else in the universe who can *always* deal with your circumstances—only God. "Always," "in everything"—*no exceptions!*

But you are not just left with this general instruction. The word "requests" implies a *specific* thing to ask; and he says: "by prayer and supplication." He uses a general word for praying; it is *always* right to pray—as in: "Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks...rejoice always" (1 Thess. 5:16-18; cf. Ps. 62:8). But he also uses the word "supplication"—a very specific word, talking about a specific thing; not just, "I'm anxious so I'm going to recite the Lord's Prayer," but, "I am going to talk to the Lord *specifically* about this thing that makes me anxious."

And doing it "with thanksgiving" is as crucial as the rest. I said last time that it is the last thing from your mind, when you are in a hard situation, to be thankful. That is why it is one of the *best* things to do; because when you are thankful, it turns your thoughts toward God—and "thanksgiving" is *absolutely crucial* in the recipe to the Antidote For Anxiety.

Then comes the relief. Now, last time, we had to really hurry when we go to this point, so let's take a careful look at Verse 7—"And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." "The peace of God" tells you that this wonderful thing is something that God Himself imparts to you.

I said this cure won't work if you have a deficient view of God. If you don't have a view of God that matches who He really is, if you really *don't* think He is in control of everything, *praying* is not going to help you! If you are praying to somebody *impotent*, why *bother?* Pray to somebody *omnipotent*—all-powerful. *That* is who God is!

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And you see, once you have made "peace *with* God" through Jesus Christ, you can have the "peace *of* God"—the peace which God gives (Col. 3:15; 2 Thess. 3:16). Look at this little sequence of statements in Romans Chapter 5, Verse 1—starting there: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." Go on and read through the chapter: "while we were enemies," Christ died for our sins; the enmity has been wiped away; we are now "reconciled" (vs. 10). We stand in the place of being at "peace with God"—that is a *never*-changing, constant possession of every child of God: You are at "peace with God" (cf. Jn. 5:24; 2 Cor. 5:18; Col. 1:20).

Then, look at Romans 15:13—"Now may the God of hope *fill* you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Do you see that? Now that you *are* His child, you can be *filled* with His "peace"! You are at "peace *with* God"; *now* you can experience the "peace *of* God" (cf. Rom. 14:17; Gal. 5:22).

And Jesus *meant* it to be this way. Remember His disciples, on the night that He had the Last Supper with them, and they were so grieved that He was going away. Certainly, they were full of anxiety. And what does Jesus say? John 14:27—"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." (cf. Jn. 16:33)

The world has many ways of seeking relief from anxiety. You can try to cover it up with alcohol or drugs or denial or La-La Land Theology of the New Age—but you can have *real* peace that only God can give.

One dear brother in Christ—who is now *with* the Lord, at complete peace—William Hendriksen wrote this years ago in his commentary; I love the way he put it: "Peace is the smile of God reflected in the soul of the believer. It is the heart's calm after Calvary's storm. It is the firm conviction that 'He who spared not His own Son' will surely also, along 'with Him...freely give us all things' (Rom. 8:32). In the present context, it is the God-given reward resulting from joyful reflection on God's bounties, magnanimity toward the neighbor, and trustful prayer in God." (cf. Is. 26:3)

This is "peace" which, according to the verse itself, "surpasses all comprehension." Now, how do you describe something that is beyond description? How do you comprehend something that is beyond "all comprehension"? We kind of have a saying for that: "You have to be there." You can experience it—this is *very* experiential.

By nature, man is *totally* unable to comprehend this wonderful peace (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9). A blind person can never fully appreciate a beautiful sunset, no matter how carefully it is described to him. And even as believers, this is something that you do not comprehend with the understanding as much as you *experience it in your soul*, you experience it in your heart; it touches you on the inside.

It is so difficult to comprehend or describe because it has to do with the very center of your being. It is that which "guard[s] your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

There are several things that we can say about that:

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"The peace of God" is a blessing available *only* "in Christ Jesus." If you *don't* belong to Christ, the news that I have for you is: I have *absolutely no lasting help whatsoever* for you to deal with stress and anxiety! I don't know what to tell you, except that *there is no cure!* Apart from Christ, life is tough *and then you die*—and that is the truth! And after that comes a Christless eternity (2 Thess. 1:9), "tormented day and night, forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). How *practical* is it to know Jesus Christ? Eternally—the difference between Heaven and Hell. Here on Earth—the difference between "peace...which surpasses all comprehension" and "you really ought to be scared" (see Heb. 10:27). It is *that* big a difference! You will find this peace *nowhere else* (cf. Acts 4:12); and someone who does not know Christ can, at best, have nothing better than a counterfeit or some sort of anesthetic to cover up the pain for a while. "The peace of God" is a blessing that comes from knowing Jesus Christ.

Notice also, it says it "guards" you. That is an interesting term that Paul used. We know that Philippi, as a city, was mainly a military outpost, so it was a good word-picture for Paul to write. The Philippians were *quite* familiar with the sight of soldiers standing guard. And when Paul wrote this, he was probably looking at a soldier who was guarding him, because he was in prison when he wrote it.

This "peace of God"—which is appropriated "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving"—stands "guard" over your "heart" and your "mind" when anxiety tries to mount a counterattack against your faith in Christ.

And notice also: This is a ministry of God to your "heart" and to your "mind." Interesting that he chose those words. What he means is: It is a ministry to *all* of you, the *totality* of you. It affects you emotionally, it affects you spiritually—it even affects you physically.

Your "heart" is the center of your being; it is the decision-making place from which everything important about you emanates (e.g., Rom. 6:17; 10:9; Eph. 4:18; Heb. 3:12).

Your "mind" has to do with your thinking (Rom. 8:5-6; Col. 3:2). Center your thinking on God—where it belongs anyway—and you will not be anxious, you will no longer do anything unreasonable or foolish, like being anxious.

So he says it "guard[s] your hearts and minds"—it takes care of *all of you*. Sometimes the Bible uses terminology—"body, soul, and spirit": First Thessalonians 5:23—"may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete..." Sometimes the Bible says to "Love the Lord your God" with your "heart...soul...mind...and strength" (Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27). Sometimes it just says "you"; sometimes it says "soul"; sometimes it just says "heart." Here it says "your heart and your mind." The point is: It applies to *all of you* (e.g., Job 38:36; Ps. 51:6; Prov. 20:27). There is *no part of your existence* that is not touched by "the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension."

So what do we do with this issue of anxiety?

Well, realize first of all: How you handle it is a *very* significant part of Your Testimony. When you need to, use the Emergency Antidote.

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Then, the third part of this wonderful paragraph: Inoculate Yourself.

Now, I am glad for the antihistamines that I can use when I have an allergic reaction to something. But I *prefer to prevent* the inappropriate reaction in the first place! And I have some medicine that, during certain times of the season when certain little beasties grow from little flowers around here, I take these things faithfully every day; and for the most part, I don't have to *deal with* the overreaction.

Well, what follows here in our text is a prescription that God has given you that, if you take it faithfully, it will virtually eliminate anxiety from your life. Starting at Verse 8—there's a mouthful in this verse—"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." (NASB-1977)

One command there: "Let your mind dwell on these things." Can I reword that for you a little bit? "Chooser to focus your mind on these things."

Now, there is a strange theme-word in this verse; it is repeated six times: the word "whatever." Now, shall I do a biblical exposition of the word "whatever"? That could take a while. But what he means is this: When he says, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable," he means: "I want you to choose to make your mind 'dwell' on *everything to do* with the truth—'*whatever* is true,' '*whatever* is pure'—not just a *little bit* of 'truth,' not just a *little bit* of 'honor,' not just a *little bit* of 'righteousness'; '*whatever*' is any of those things. And don't just memorize one little pithy saying about each one of those categories, not just one clever thought—*everything about it!*"

And the command: "Let your mind dwell on these things." The word that is translated "let your mind dwell" is a word that flows over into English. The Greek word is *logizomai*. All of our words that have to do with "logic" come from this root word. It has to do with reasoning, considering, reckoning, taking into account, or thinking on a subject. And it is one of those present-tense commands that requires continual, habitual, repeated action. You must take this medicine all the time (cf. Matt. 26:41a, NASB, LSB, AMP); you cannot expect it to work if you wait until the attack is upon you. Then you can revert to Verses 6 and 7, but I think your *goal* for Philippians 4:4-9 ought to be to *never have to use* Verse 6 and Verse 7. You *will*, because you are human (Ps. 94:19).

But here is what to reason upon, what to think about, what to fill your mind with—quite a list, starting with "whatever is true." Only truth can combat error. And what is the definition of anxiety? Anxiety is the set of emotions that you feel when you get distracted from the truth about God. So, *obviously*, the first part of the inoculation is "whatever is true." If anxiety is the result of believing lies about God, no matter how temporarily, believing lies about yourself and your circumstances, then cure it with the truth. *Prevent* it with the truth! Jesus prayed for us: "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). Don't stay away from God's Word, and then wonder why anxiety is a problem for you! Fill your heart with the Word (Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; 119:11, 15, 30, 97, 99; Col. 3:16; Jude 20).

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When I was in Russia, I had probably five times, somewhere less than five minutes notice that I was about to preach or teach somewhere. I was just getting ready to call home, send some e-mails, write something on our blog, when Vadim's happy face came into our door, and he said, "Jim! You come teach kids?" Didn't have a translator so I grabbed one, went down there, and spent two hours with the kids.

Now, understand: "Youth Group" there is 12 to Not-married-yet, all together. And they *get along*, and they take care of each other. It *is* a different culture, mind you—I'm not saying that is what we need to do; but I'm saying: "That's how they are."

And the first part of Youth Group was this: Going around the room, having each one answer, "Okay, what have you been reading?" The *presupposition* was that they were *all* reading through the Bible in a year! *And every single one* answered: "I've been reading this." Some said, "I've been reading a little bit in the Old Testament, a little bit in the New Testament." Others were on a different schedule. And they *all shared*. And I'm thinking, "You know, *what an idea!* 'Whatever is true,' fill your mind with it."

"Whatever is honorable"—that means: anything worthy of respect or honor; something noble, dignified, reverent, majestic, awe-inspiring. Think on *God!* (Ps. 16:8; 77:11; 107:43; 111:2; 143:5; 145:5) Think on the things that God has wrought through faithful men and faithful women in history. That's why sometimes reading biographies of Christians can be such an uplifting thing, because you see the practical reality of God at work in someone's life, and that can be contagious (cf. Heb. 13:7b).

Just think on "whatever is right"—that's the basic root word for "right" and "righteous." So don't go filling your mind with thoughts of things that are wrong, and then wonder why you are prone to being anxious! God blesses "right" and "righteousness" (Prov. 15:9; cf. Ps. 5:12; Prov. 2:8; 3:33; 10:6).

Think on "whatever is pure"—that means *morally* pure and undefiled. This is the word that is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament for ceremonial purification: when something was rigorously pure in God's eyes.

He says "whatever is lovely"—that means acceptable and pleasing. It is said to describe those things which *grace attracts*. It's an interesting word. I was looking it up again this week. It is literally a combination of "toward" and "love": Think on things, fill your minds with things that tend to drive you "toward" demonstrating God's "love" to other people. That's what it means! If you fill your mind with *ugly* things, if you fill your mind with thoughts that tend to isolate you from other people, you are more prone to anxiety. Focus on "lovely" things—things that move people toward loving each other (Matt. 5:9; Acts 7:26; Rom. 14:19; 1 Thess. 3:12).

He says to fill your mind with "whatever is of good repute"—the word is literally "well-sounded" or "appealing" or "praiseworthy and attractive." Fill your mind with the things that have a good reputation for producing positive results, and you will lessen your susceptibility to anxiety.

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"If there is any excellence," he says. "Excellence" is the word for "moral excellence" (2 Pet. 1:5). It has to do with pursuing virtue and purity. If you live your life trying to figure out, "How much can I get away with?" (e.g., Rom. 6:15) instead of living your life trying to be as good as you can (e.g., Jn. 15:8), you simply make yourself more susceptible to anxiety (Is. 48:22).

"Anything worthy of praise"—that's obvious. Don't think on things worthy of condemnation and repulsion. Think on things which are worthy of the highest thoughts of wonder and joy—the things which lead to praise and thanksgiving with God.

Friend, here is the Inoculation For Anxiety: "Let your mind dwell on these things." Now, because of the way the English language is, the word "let"—it sounds kind of like "ask permission" or something like that. It is actually an imperative: *Think* about these things. *Ruminate* upon them. *Review* them. *Talk* about them. *Ponder* them. *Memorize* them. *Make them* your topic of discussion. *Go over* them again and again (Pr. 4:21).

My friend, if anxiety is "getting distracted from the truth about God" or "ignoring what you know to be true about God and what He says," then obeying Philippians 4:8 is nothing more than, and nothing less than, dwelling on *who God is*, and focusing on the things He likes, the things He blesses (Prov. 4:20; cf. Ps. 19:14; 119:95b; 1 Tim. 4:7b).

Now, that is *half* of the preventative medicine for anxiety. That clearly has to do with your mind: "Let your mind dwell on these things." *Choose* to think in this way.

The *rest* of this medicine—we have only filled *half* the syringe now—the rest of it has to do with not only what you *think* but how you *act*. Look at Verse 9—"The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, *practice these things*, and the God of peace will be with you."

The next part of this prescription has to do with cultivating a life that makes you *famous* for *actions* of godly living. Paul uses himself as an example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 3:7, 9). I would think that a guy that is ministering from prison to thousands of people all spread all over the Roman Empire would be a *pretty good example* of somebody who is living in "the peace of God" in the midst of a circumstance that could be anxious (cf. 2 Cor. 6:4-10; 11:23-28; 12:10). Falsely accused; falsely imprisoned; having the whole process *strung out* for all this time; *shipwrecked on the way to prison*, for goodness sakes; beaten unjustly—*no wonder* he uses himself as an example, just like we should. Pick out the most effective people you know, and "imitate" their successful spiritual lives (Heb. 13:7).

"The things you have *learned* and *received* and *heard* and *seen*..." What you have "learned" is what you have taken in by imitation, by practice. What you have "received" is what you have truly believed. What you have "heard" is what you have been told. What you have "seen" is what you have witnessed working in somebody else's life.

What was the command in Verse 8? "Think on these things" (KJV). *Choose* to fill your mind with and focus your mind on the right thing.

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Now, here is the command in this part: "Practice these things." And this one also has the sense of continuous, repeated actions—over and over and over again. *Think* the right way and *act* the right way in light of thinking on the right things (Jn. 13:17; Jas. 1:25), and you are going to have *tremendous ability* to prevent anxious overreactions. People who are prone to anxiety usually fail to fill their minds with the right things, and they tend to spend more time *worrying* than *doing* something.

Now, I don't say that to be critical of people who might be caught in a web of anxiety today. I am not trying to make anyone feel ashamed or guilty or unloved or unwanted. I want to help you *cut free of* a web of anxiety that entraps you. I say this because *God* says it, and because it is the only truth that *can* cut through the web, that can *give you* personal victory over anxiety!

But, look at the promise here. This is incredible! "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, *and*"—notice carefully the wording—"the God of peace will be with you."

Now, in Verse 7, there was a great promise: "The *peace of God*...will guard your hearts and your minds." But, along with "the peace of God" comes "the God of peace"—they're a *package deal*! And "peace" is His provision and blessing, but *He* comes along with it—it is a *real living relationship* with God Himself! (Jn. 14:21, 23; Jas. 4:8) Now, that is *not* to say that if you are anxious, God abandons you—that is *not* what it says. But you will know with great intimacy the God who gives His supernatural "peace which surpasses comprehension" *when* you fill your mind with the things that you should fill it with, and you live your life *doing* the things that bring Him glory (Lk. 11:28; Jn. 14:23; 1 Jn. 3:22).

So, *this is practical*. This is *not* just theoretical stuff! This is *real*.

And I am going to ask you—you don't have to raise your hand, but: Are you caught in anxiety today? Is there something you just *cannot* seem to let go of? Is there something *robbing* you of sleep, making you short-tempered, occupying your mind all the time? Well, if you are caught in anxiety, take the cure: "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." Take it to God (Ps. 55:22; 1 Pet. 5:7). *Leve it there*. Linger in prayer, thanking God for everything you can think of (Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18). And *move on!*

I admire the people who are gifted at counseling and seeing the connections and things. One of the most practical suggestions I ever heard [was from] a guy that was really gifted at counseling. He said this: "Okay, I know you are anxious. I know this is bothering you. I want you to write it down on a card; write down exactly what it is—fit it on a three by five card. Turn the card over. On the back of it, write down '12 o'clock.' And then tomorrow at noon, pull out that card; and you are allowed 30 minutes to worry about it. *Not until noon tomorrow! Not more than 30 minutes!* Noon. Every day. That is your 'worry time.' Otherwise—do not get anxious about what you cannot control. The second day: 25 minutes. Third day: 20 minutes." Nobody makes it to Day 3, because that little exercise makes you realize how *pitifully silly it is*—because you *have* the ability to *change* the focus of your thoughts, to put them on Almighty God who is in control of everything anyway (Ps. 103:19; Eph. 1:11), and you *don't need* to be anxious about it!

Sermon Title: The Innoculation For Anxiety
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:7-9 (Philippians #14)

Speaker: Jim Harris
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Everybody can get caught up in anxiety! Take the Cure.

Now, *some* people are *more prone* to anxiety than others. Some people are more prone to infection than others. Some people are more prone to allergies than others, okay? Some people have to battle it a little bit harder. If you are *prone* to anxiety, take the Prevention. You should anyway, whether you are especially prone to it or not.

Fill your mind with the right things, and spend *all the energy you have* living them out (Mk. 12:30; 2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 12:1; 2 Pet. 1:5-7). *You will be amazed!* Just read through the Bible once. "Well, wait a minute! That would take a long time!" *Yeah!* You would have to *focus your mind on the things of God over and over and over again, day in and day out, to get there!* THAT'S THE POINT!

Take the Prevention! Take the medication! Go read Matthew 6:25-33 as often as you need to. Jesus taught that anxiety is *unreasonable for a child of God!* Remember the things He says there about "the birds of the air," about "the flowers of the field"?

Have you ever seen a bird plant a seed? We have a lot of people around us in a little park near our backyard who feed birds. Those birds never take those seeds and scratch a neat little row and put the seeds in and say, "I'm coming back here next July. This is going to be good!" Have you ever seen a bird weed his garden? Have you ever seen a bird systematically harvest his crop? *That's silly!* Yet the birds are kept alive by their faithful Creator who "feeds them" every day.

Have you ever seen a flower out shopping for a new outfit? Well, that's the picture God gives you! *God arrays them in all of their beauty!*

And the *punchline* from Jesus' words there in Matthew Chapter 6, after the flowers and the birds, is: "Are you not worth much more than they?" Yes, of course you are! (see Deut. 32:10; Mal. 3:16-17; Matt. 10:31)

Jesus is saying, "If the birds—who cannot in *any* significant sense plan ahead—have no reason to worry, then *certainly* you—who are endowed with so much greater intelligence so that you *can* take thought for the future—you should not be anxious about it! If God provides for even these lower creatures, *how much more* will He provide for you who were created in His own image?"

To be anxious over the things of the world is to stumble from faith in God. It is to temporarily lack "faith" (Lk. 8:25). Anxiety is allowing yourself to be distracted from who God is and what He has said in His Word by paying improper attention to circumstances. So, anxiety is *completely unreasonable* in light of who God is! And Jesus had the audacity to connect anxiety to a lack of faith *because* He knew the truth! He knew the truth.

And in this case, the repentance that is necessary is a matter of doing the very things that are going to give you the most joy every day anyway—all the time, regardless of your circumstances. "Whatever is true...honorable...right...pure...lovely..." "In *everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving..." *It works!* It works.

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Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, wrapped around some people's hearts—perhaps even here today—are webs of anxiety. I pray that You will teach us by Your Spirit, and give us wisdom and conviction to follow through with that which You teach us: to live in such a way that we do not allow those webs ever to stick again. Thank You for Your grace and the riches that are ours in Jesus Christ. Please, minister to each heart here, according to what only You can do, that we would be all the more useful for Your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.