

Gospel-Shaped Affections: Anxious for Nothing, Prayerful in Everything

Philippians 4:6–7

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Introduction

We live in a time when it is easy to worry. A weakening economy leaves us anxious about our finances. Will our jobs continue to be stable? Will our wages be sufficient to cover our expenses? The rising costs of food, housing, and fuel can leave us wondering how we're going to pay the mortgage, the electric bill, the phone bill, the car insurance. The precarious position of our health insurance system, along with the instability of programs like social security and Medicare can leave us anxious about having the resources to take care of loved ones as they grow older and require increased healthcare. It can leave us anxious about having the resources to take care of *ourselves* as the same happens to us. And it can leave us anxious about the world our children and grandchildren will be growing up in, if things continue down the path they're heading. Political instability continues to characterize our world—all the more so recently considering the unrest in the Ukraine and Russia's invasion of Crimea. The threat of war is ever-present in one corner of the world or another—North Korea is test firing rockets into the ocean, Iran is attempting to build a nuclear weapon, and now it seems that Russia has aspirations of developing into a dominating power. The earthquake near Encino that happened this past Monday reminds us that at any moment something entirely out of our control could destroy our lives as we know them. We live in a time when it is *easy* to worry.

And anxiety is, in fact, ubiquitous in our society. Our families, our finances, our jobs, our future, our health, our relationships, the way people think about us—our society worries about everything. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America reports that more than 40 million adults in the United States have been diagnosed with some form of anxiety disorder. That's 18% of the United States population, making anxiety disorders the most common so-called “mental illness” in the country. With conditions on the books such as Acute Stress Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Panic Attack Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder, Social Phobia, Specific Phobia, and—in case we missed anything—Generalized Anxiety Disorder it's no wonder the popular health website, WebMD.com, calls us the U.S.A.: the United States of *Anxiety*.

And people seem to be very committed to finding a solution. I did a Google search for “cure anxiety” and in 0.41 seconds had nearly 30 million web pages all promising an answer. Then I

searched for “how to find peace,” and in 0.18 seconds I got 625 million hits. Again, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America reports that, according to a study published in *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, [anxiety disorders cost the U. S. more than 42 billion dollars per year](#). AnxietyCentre.com reports that 43% of North Americans take mood altering prescriptions regularly, and that [Paxil and Zoloft—two of the more popular anti-anxiety medications, also used to treat depression—ranked 7th and 8th in the top ten prescribed medications in the United States, and in 2002 totaled almost 5 billion dollars in sales](#). Today, you can buy these drugs online without any prescription.

Would it be fair to conclude from all of that that people are desperate to be free from anxiety? 625 million Google hits? 42 billion dollars in research? 43% of people on mood altering drugs and many people purchasing them without a prescription? The world is desperate to find peace.

And in the face of all those statistics, and in the face of all of those concerns about finances, and health, and old age, and the state of the world—concerns that seem so basic and so foundational to the very fabric of our lives—the Word of God cuts entirely across the grain of all of that and has the *audacity* to *command* us, with utter simplicity, to “**Be anxious for nothing.**”

And not only does God’s Word lay this duty upon our shoulders, it also strengthens our hands to perform this duty by telling us *how*. While the world drives itself crazy looking for the cure for anxiety in self-help books, in positive-thinking seminars, and in the “magic bullet” happy pills of prescription medication, the cure for anxiety has been clearly prescribed in a two-thousand year-old publication that the so-called “mental health professionals” have managed to overlook! Here on the pages of Scripture, in the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church of Philippi, we find the antidote to anxiety and the prescription for peace.

And it comes in the context of Paul’s remarks on the pursuit of spiritual stability. In the opening verse of chapter 4, he exhorts the Philippians, “**Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.**” And over the past number of weeks we have been studying the *means* of true, biblical steadfastness—how we as the people of God will be a steadfast, spiritually stable people—even in the midst of the pressures of a hostile society outside of the church, and even amidst struggles and conflicts with our brothers and sisters within the church.

That first means of steadfastness was revealed to us in verses 2 and 3, where Paul dealt with the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche. There we learned that disunity is a grave threat to the stability and steadfastness of any church, and that if we are going to be the sort of people who are truly rooted in the firm soil of Christ Jesus we must be diligently devoted to preserving unity in the body of Christ.

And then in verse 4 we are instructed to **rejoice in the Lord always**. If, as the Apostle James says, **the source of quarrels and conflicts among us is our pleasures that wage war in our members** (Jas 4:1), it only makes sense that we should be commanded to rejoice in the Lord. Because when we seek all our pleasure and all our joy in Him, we will find satisfaction, and will no longer feel the need to quarrel and bicker about things which, if we could have them, wouldn't bring us as much pleasure as the Lord Himself does anyway! So if we would be marked by the kind of spiritual stability that Paul calls us to as the people of God, we must also relentlessly pursue our joy in the Lord.

And last time we considered verse 5, in which Paul called us all to be marked by an eminent and demonstrable gentleness of spirit. If we are committed to rejoicing in the Lord always, that joy will so satisfy our souls that it will overflow into a manifest gentleness in the way we deal with others.

And it's in that context that we come to a **fourth means** of cultivating a biblical steadfastness. To be spiritual stable requires not only a diligent devotion to unity, a relentless pursuit of joy in the Lord, and a demonstrable gentleness of spirit. It also requires that we **battle all forms of anxiety by means of thankful prayer**. We see that clearly from our text this morning, verses 6 and 7. Paul writes, **"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

And like unity, joy, and gentleness, it's very difficult to overestimate the importance of severing the root of anxiety in the Christian life. In his excellent book on sanctification, *Future Grace*, John Piper writes about how many other sins spring from anxiety. He says, **"Anxiety about finances can give rise to coveting and greed and hoarding and stealing. Anxiety about succeeding at some task can make you irritable and abrupt and surly. Anxiety about relationships can make you withdrawn and indifferent and uncaring about other people. Anxiety about how someone will respond to you can make you cover over the truth and lie about things. So if anxiety could be conquered, a mortal blow would be struck to many other sins"** (53).

And not only is the fight against anxiety eminently strategic in our fight for holiness. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says our ability, by God's grace, to respond to difficult circumstances without anxiety is a great test of our profession of faith. He writes, **"Perhaps nothing provides such a thorough test of our faith and of our whole Christian position as just this matter. It is one thing to say that you subscribe to the Christian faith; it is one thing, having read your Bible and abstracted its doctrine, to say, 'Yes, I believe all that, it is the faith by which I live.' [It's another thing to live by it.] ... It is a subtle and delicate test of our position because it is such an essentially practical test. It is far removed from the realm of mere theory. You are *in* the position, you are *in* the situation, these things *are* happening to you, and the question is, *what is your faith***

worth at that point? Does it differentiate you from people who have no faith?” (Life of Peace, 166, emphases added).

Surely, we want to be a people who answer, “Yes,” to that question. Surely, we want to say that, “Yes, my faith in Christ and in His promises is a living and breathing reality that protects me from anxiety in the most trying of circumstances.” And yet so many of us recognize that we are not there yet.

And so we must be *equipped*, friends, to engage in this battle against anxiety and against the unbelief from which it springs. And we will look to this text of God’s Word to equip us, as we examine what Paul has to say about the antidote to anxiety and the pathway to peace. We’ll outline our thoughts according to the **three components** that make up this text. First, we have **the prohibition** against anxiety in the first part of verse 6. Second, **the prescription** for thankful prayer in the second half of verse 6. And third, **the promise** of God’s peace in verse 7. The prohibition, the prescription, and the promise.

I. The Prohibition: Be Anxious for Nothing (v. 6a)

First, let us consider **the prohibition**. Verse 6 says plainly: “**Be anxious for nothing.**”

Now, in order to understand the nature of this prohibition, and thus precisely what it is that we are to avoid at all costs, we have first got to understand what Paul does *not* mean by this command. In the first place, he is not encouraging a whimsical, apathetic laziness in which a person abandons all diligent planning for the future. The Proverbs say that “**the plans of the diligent succeed**” (Prov 21:5), and that “**an idle man will suffer hunger**” (Prov 19:15). To **be anxious for nothing** does not mean to be dispossessed of all responsible concern or to be careless. And so those who imagine that it’s somehow a display of great faith to sit around and do nothing to improve their circumstances while they “wait on the Lord” have surely misunderstood the Bible’s teaching on this point. Commentator Homer Kent says it well when he writes, “**As we make plans in the light of our circumstances, it is our Christian privilege to do so in full trust that our Father hears our prayers for what we need**” (*EBC*, 151–52). As Christians, it is our unique privilege to pray and trust the sovereignty of God *as* we plan, not as a substitute for our plans.

Neither is Paul prohibiting all kinds of genuine concern—even troubling concern—in the light of realistically fearful circumstances. In chapter 2 of this same letter to the Philippians, in verse 20, Paul uses this very word when he describes Timothy’s virtue. He says, “**I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.**” This compassionate and sympathetic concern for the spiritual needs of fellow believers is a *virtue*. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul tells us that God has distributed various spiritual gifts to the body of Christ for the express purpose that the various members would *care* for one another in this way (1 Cor 12:25). And

Paul himself, being the good pastor that he was, spoke of the **daily pressure of concern** that he had **for all the churches** in 2 Corinthians 11:28. And so the shepherd of God's flock who feels no real burden for the sanctification and growth of the people to whom God has entrusted to his care is not worthy of his position. And the Christian who is not anxious—in the sense of being eagerly and excitedly expectant—to meet the needs of his brothers and sisters in the body of Christ is derelict in his duty. And we could apply this principle even further and say that the parents who are not genuinely concerned about the physical and spiritual well-being of their children are not good parents!

And so Paul is not forbidding these kinds of genuine, responsible concerns for the people and affairs entrusted into one's stewardship. The **prohibition** to be anxious for nothing speaks rather of what we understand naturally as anxiety. It is fretfulness, excessive worry—the harassing, wearying care that troubles the soul, distracts the mind, and paralyzes the hands such that duties are neglected.

We see this illustrated in Martha in Luke chapter 10. You remember that Martha had welcomed Jesus into her home, and was running around like a chicken with its head cut off trying to make all the preparations in order to be a proper hostess. She was re-arranging the furniture to accommodate a large crowd, and keeping the hors d'oeuvres tray full while keeping an eye on dinner in the oven. Luke 10:40 says she was "**distracted with all her preparations.**" And the whole time she's running the household her sister Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His word. And so Martha comes to Jesus and says, "Lord, can't you see I'm going crazy trying to do all the serving myself? Tell my sister to help me!" And Jesus says, "**Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.**" In the midst of trying to be a good hostess—which is a good thing! these things had to get done!—Martha had allowed legitimate concerns to have too great a place in her heart and her mind, and she became *anxious*. "Ok! Company's coming over! Got to have the food, and the drinks, and got to rearrange—" And these things had so occupied her mind that they kept her from the one thing that was necessary: sitting at the feet of Jesus and treasuring His Word.

This is the anxiety that we must banish from our lives. It's that general spirit of worry that gets a hold of our imagination and says, "Sure, everything is OK now, but what if *this* happens, and it leads to *that*?! Then we'll be in *this* condition and we'll have no way to get out of it!" And Paul is saying that kind of frenzied anxiety arising from the tyranny of our circumstances has no place in the heart of a Christian.

And this teaching is simply an echo of the teaching of Jesus Himself. Turn to Matthew 6. In the middle of the Sermon on the Mount—the declaration from the King Himself about what it meant to be a subject of His Kingdom—Jesus spends *ten verses* instructing His disciples on banishing

anxiety from their life. Look with me at Matthew 6 verse 25: “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried—or, do not be anxious; same word—about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! ³¹Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ ³²For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

You see? Being anxious about these things—that’s a mark of the *pagans*. The *Gentiles* are worried about these things, because they don’t have a heavenly Father who cares for them, who knows their needs, and who is sovereign to meet every one of them. But you do! And so when Jesus laments, “O you of little faith!” He’s saying that anxiety stems from a failure to *trust* in God’s caring provision for His children.

And so we are commanded to *be anxious for nothing*, because we have a Heavenly Father who is sovereign over *everything*. The **prohibition** is exhaustive: no matter what combination of difficult circumstances we find ourselves in, we are not to indulge feelings of sinful anxiety. The Philippians were facing difficult circumstances in which they were tempted to be sinfully anxious. As we’ve mentioned before, Paul has spoken of their *opponents* in chapter 1 verse 28, of their *suffering* for Christ’s sake in verse 29, and of their *conflict* in verse 30. They were experiencing the hostility of the outside world as a result of their commitment to Christ; the threat of persecution was very real. And in that stressful environment Paul commands them to be anxious for nothing.

You say, “Mike, it’s easy for you to stand up there and exhort us to be anxious for nothing. What do *you* have to be anxious about?” And you might have a point, if *I* was the one who wrote this command. But *Paul* wrote this command. And he wasn’t in his ivory tower at the corner of Easy and Breezy Streets when he wrote it. He sat in house arrest, chained 18 inches away from a Roman soldier, and was awaiting his trial before a psychopath who would decide whether he would live or die. The great expositor Alexander MacLaren said, “It is easy for prosperous people, who have nothing to trouble them, to give good advices to suffering hearts; and these are generally as futile as they are easy. But who was he who here said to the Church at Philippi, ‘Be

[anxious] for nothing?’ A prisoner in a Roman prison; and when Rome fixed its claws it did not usually let go without drawing blood. ... Everything in the future was entirely dark and uncertain. It was this man, with all the pressure of personal sorrows weighing upon him, who, in the very crisis of his life, turned to his brethren in Philippi, who had far fewer causes of anxiety than he had, and cheerfully bade them” to **be anxious for nothing**. And when the Philippians considered these truths—where Paul was and what he was facing as he wrote this—I believe they were strengthened all the more to battle every inkling of anxiety that had sought to creep into their hearts.

And that needs to have the same effect on you, GraceLife. It is a command from God’s own Word that is just as binding as, “You shall not steal,” “You shall not commit adultery,” and “You shall not murder.” But again, I know that, just like with the commands to joyfulness and gentleness in all circumstances, objections arise in your hearts. “But Mike, how can Paul *say* that? I haven’t been able to find a steady job for a couple of *years* already! The bills need to be paid and I have no idea where the money’s gonna come from! My children are beginning to go to school and I’m so preoccupied with their safety. I don’t want them to fall into the wrong crowd, and I so badly want them to be saved! My boss is entirely unreasonable and I go from crippling deadline to crippling deadline all year round, and it’s just so much stress! There’s a really difficult conversation that I have to have with a brother in the Lord and I just know he’s not going to take it well. I’ve been in for some tests and the doctors say it might be cancer!” But in the face of all of those very real concerns, our infinitely wise God has so superintended the pen of the Apostle Paul as to command us Himself, “**Be anxious for nothing.**”

II. The Prescription: Be Prayerful in Everything (v. 6b)

“But how can that be? How in the world can we be expected to be anxious for *nothing*?!” And that brings us to our **second point: the prescription**. Look again with me at verse 6: “**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**” Here we learn that **the way to be anxious for nothing is to be prayerful in everything**.

The reason we are tempted to become sinfully anxious in the various circumstances of life is because, in one form or another, we believe that our needs will go unmet. As much as we might try to be, we know that *we* are not in control of everything in our lives; and the things we can’t control, we worry about. But Paul teaches us in this text that the antidote for anxiety comes from presenting our petitions before the sovereign God of the universe—who *is* in control of everything in our lives, and who has promised, Philippians 4:19, to **supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus**.

The very things that would tempt us to be anxious, these very things we are to take before the throne of grace in prayer. The contrastive parallelism is very apparent: “**Be anxious for nothing, but, in everything ... let your requests be made known to God.**” Just as the prohibition was exhaustive, so also is the **prescription** exhaustive. In all the situations and circumstances of life that would be the occasion of sinful anxiety, we are to turn these troubles into specific requests that we make of the God who **causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose** (Rom 8:28). Calvin said, in the midst of all our trials, “**this is our consolation, this our solace— ... to disburden in the bosom of God everything that harasses us**” (119). What a beautiful picture! To unload upon the bosom of God everything that harasses us. Or, in the language of the Apostle Peter: “**...casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you**” (1 Pet 5:7).

Let’s look more into the character of this prayer that is said to be the cure of anxiety. We’ve already seen that it is to be prayer *in everything*—that is in all circumstances and in all situations. But we also see Paul pile three words for prayer one right on top of the other. He speaks of *prayer*, *supplication*, and *requests*—all three common words for prayer throughout Scripture. The first word, translated “prayer” in this passage, is *proseuchē*. On occasion, it’s used to describe prayer in a general sense, but often it refers specifically to petitions and supplications (O’Brien, 492). The second word, translated “supplication,” is *déēsis*, which is a specific word for petition. So these two terms are basically synonyms of one another, and the fact that they’re used together strongly emphasizes the petitionary nature of this kind of prayer and the urgency of the need. And then the final word is “requests,” *aitēma*. And unlike the first two terms which described types of prayer, this word describes the specific requests you ask for.

And so there can be no mistaking Paul’s point here: the antidote for anxiety is the kind of petitionary prayer that makes specific requests of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in the context of a relationship with Him. This prayer that is the pathway to peace is not a sort of semi-consciousness meditative state that some people call prayer. It is not a turning in on *yourself*, and achieving some sort of heightened state of consciousness or transcendental oneness with some generic higher power. That’s nothing more than humanistic mysticism, and it’s a very popular view of spirituality these days. At the heart of it is the idea that the path to peace is to be found within yourself. It’s a sort of Eastern mysticism baptized in the polluted river of Western narcissism that materializes in authors like Tony Robbins, Oprah, and Joel Osteen. But Paul emphatically contradicts that, and requires that these specific requests be made known “**to God,**” or “**in the presence of God.**” This phrase is *pros ton Theon*, in the Greek. It’s that same phrase in John 1:1 that speaks of Jesus as the Word being *with* God, in His presence. It speaks of communion—of intimate *personal* relationship—and so reminds us that the cure for anxiety will *not* be found within ourselves, but only as we look *away* from ourselves and *outside* of ourselves to the all-powerful, all-sufficient God who works all things after the counsel of His own will.

And this also implies, briefly, that we ought not to pray in vague generalities for God to relieve our anxieties. Sometimes we have the tendency to be vague in our prayers. We say things like, “Lord we pray for James...” and then we stop right there. Well *what* do you pray for James? Ask for something specific. That is the kind of thing that Paul is after in this text. The cure for anxiety is not in hurried, quick, microwave requests for a generic peace or calm. **It is in the quiet submission of an undivided heart that takes *specific* cares and turns them into *specific* prayers.**

Furthermore, Paul says that we are to let these specific requests *be made known to God*. Now, that’s a funny way to put it: to make your requests known to God. Paul’s point in saying that is not to suggest that we need to inform God of something He doesn’t already know. We read the passage in Matthew 6:32, where Jesus says that the very reason we ought not to be anxious about our daily necessities is because “*your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*” A few verses earlier in Matthew 6 verse 8, He taught His disciples not to pray with meaningless repetition precisely because “*your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*” So why does Paul speak this way?

He does so because when the people of God lay out all of their requests before Him in prayer, we are “*casting all our cares on Him,*” as Peter says (1 Pet 5:7). It is in this full self-disclosure of our neediness and our helplessness that we express our complete and utter dependence upon Him for our welfare. And at the same time we are expressing confident trust in Him to provide for us. We’re openly acknowledging, “Lord, I find myself in a set of circumstances that I just cannot navigate on my own. I am entirely insufficient within myself to do a thing about them. But in the depth of my need, I call out to You who are perfectly sufficient in precisely the ways in which I am insufficient. Where I am weak, You are strong. Where I am impotent, You are powerful. And because You are the only One sufficient to supply my need, I come to You and ask for Your grace and peace.”

Do you see how that *glorifies* God? That’s why God says in Psalm 50 verse 15: “*Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me*” (ESV). When we call upon Him in the day of trouble—looking to Him as our all-powerful Provider and Deliverer—our need *magnifies* His sufficiency to meet that need. And so because He delights to display His glory as Deliverer, He delights to deliver us! O let us worship God for His loving wisdom of devising such a scheme in which the pursuit of *His* glory is the same pursuit as *our* good.

And one final thought as we consider this **prescription** for peace. This prayer and supplication in which we are to make our requests known to God is to be characterized in its entirety by thanksgiving: “...*in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*” Thanksgiving is absolutely essential to the kind of prayer that cures anxiety. In fact, it’s so essential that commentator William Hendriksen said, “**Prayer without**

thanksgiving is like a bird without wings: such a prayer cannot rise to heaven, can find no acceptance with God” (196).

Now why is that so? Well, first of all, bathing your prayers for peace in thanksgiving ensures that you’re not doubting, questioning, or blaming God in your prayers (cf. MacArthur, 283). In the midst of trying and difficult circumstances, we can be tempted to complain to God about our circumstances, and to rebelliously demand Him to change our circumstances. But this is not the kind of prayer that avails with God for peace.

As we come to Him in humility, casting ourselves in utter dependence upon Him, making our requests with thanksgiving requires that we have subjected our desires to His perfect will. This thanksgiving is not merely an advance thank-you for His eventually answering your requests. No, it’s actually acknowledging the absolute sovereignty of God—that even the difficult circumstances that you face in life are gifts of His own Providence, circumstances in which He is in complete control. Follow me here. You don’t thank somebody for something they had no part in giving to you. If you’re thanking God for *everything*—especially for the circumstances that tempt you to be anxious—it means you’re calling to your own mind the reality that God is the providential Lord of your circumstances, the One who ordains whatsoever comes to pass. By grounding your mind in the truth of His sovereignty, you’re already on the way to battling anxiety, because this sovereign God is also the wise and loving God who is unwaveringly committed His glory and your joy. If *He* is the One in control of your circumstances, and if He as the perfect Father knows how to give good gifts to His children (Matt 7:11), then there’s nothing to be anxious about!

Pastor John puts it helpfully. He writes, “People become worried, anxious, and fearful because they do not trust in God’s wisdom, power, or goodness. . . . Thankful prayer brings release from fear and worry, because it affirms God’s sovereign control over every circumstance, and that His purpose is the believer’s good (Rom 8:28)” (283). And so Spurgeon models this kind of thankful prayer that is the antidote to anxiety: “‘Lord, I am poor. Let me bless You for my poverty and then, O Lord, will You not supply all my needs?’ That is the way to pray,” Spurgeon says. “‘Lord, I am ill. I bless You for this affliction, for I am sure that it means some good thing to me. Now be pleased to heal me, I beseech You!’ ‘Lord, I am in a great trouble, but I praise You for the trouble, for I know that it contains a blessing though the envelope is black-edged! Lord, help me through my trouble!’”

III. The Promise: The Peace of God will Guard You (v. 7)

And as we take heed to this **prescription** for thankful prayer, we will receive **the** glorious **promise** that is presented to us in verse 7. We’ve seen the prohibition—be anxious for nothing. We’ve seen the prescription—be prayerful in everything. And now we come to the **promise**.

Look with me at verse 7: “**And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**” The sure and tested result of diligently battling against all forms of anxiety by means of thankful prayer is that the peace of God Himself will reign supreme in the hearts and minds of God’s people.

And this verse connects not only to the immediately preceding verse 6, but also to the other means of spiritual stability that we have discovered in this chapter. If unity pervades the church of God, if joy in the Lord reigns in the heart, if a gentle and forbearing spirit is made manifest to everyone with whom we come in contact, and if we remain in constant prayer to our Heavenly Father—the sure and certain result of all of that is peace (cf. Hendriksen, 196).

Now notice what the text does not say. Paul does not say, “In everything let your requests be made known to God, and God will grant all your requests, summarily removing you from every anxiety-producing situation in your life.” No! He says as you humbly and faithfully call out to God for rescue, trusting Him in His sovereignty to bring to you what is best, even in the midst of your trying circumstances the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds from sinful anxiety. You see? This is not a promise that God will change our circumstances. Praise His name that the Gospel goes deeper than that! This is a promise that God will change *us*, and will *keep* us, even in the midst of trouble.

Pastor John puts it so well. He says, “**The real challenge of Christian living is not to see if you can eliminate every uncomfortable issue in your life. The real issue of Christian living is to see if you can trust your infinitely holy, sovereign, and powerful God *in the midst of* every situation and have His perfect peace.**” Such a glorious reality. That’s why Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote of this passage: “**This is undoubtedly one of the noblest, greatest, and most comforting statements which is to be found anywhere in any extant literature. ... Nothing has greater comfort for God’s people than these two verses**” (*Life of Peace*, 165).

A. A Divine Peace

Let’s learn more about this peace which we’re so bountifully promised here. First, we see that it is a divine peace. It is “**the peace of God.**” This **peace of God** has its origination in the **God of peace**, which is the name Paul ascribes to God in verse 9. This is the peace that characterizes *God Himself*. This is the peace which *God Himself* possesses. God Himself has no anxieties, no worries. He is infinitely happy, infinitely joyful, and infinitely peaceful. Spurgeon calls this peace of God “**the unruffled serenity of the infinitely happy God, the eternal composure of the absolutely well-contented God! *This,*” says Paul, “**shall possess your heart and mind.**”**

But it’s not only the peace that characterizes God; it’s the peace that God gives—the peace which comes *from* God. It’s that inward tranquility of the soul that is grounded in the presence

and the promises of God (Vincent, 135). William Hendriksen said, “Peace is the smile of God reflected in the soul of the believer. It is the heart’s calm after Calvary’s storm” (196). The Lord Jesus told the disciples in 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.” And wrapping up these concepts of steadfastness, faith, and peace all into one verse, Isaiah prays in Isaiah 26:3: “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You.”

So this is a divine peace; it is *characterized* by God and it is a *gift* from God.

B. A Supra-rational Peace

Secondly, it is a supra-rational peace. Not an *irrational* peace, but a *supra-rational* peace. It does not *violate* reason, but it certainly *transcends* reason. Look again at verse 7: “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension...” This peace transcends all human intellectual powers and capabilities of understanding.

And this means more than just that this peace is so wonderful you can’t even fathom it. It means that, but it means so much more than that. This supra-rational character of the peace of God is referring to the fact that the world has absolutely no natural explanation for it! Here you are, a blood-bought disciple and follower of Christ, living in the same fallen world, with the same disappointments, with the same broken relationships, and the same heartaches and pain that all the unbelievers you come into contact with live in. And in the midst of the deadlines at work, the sick kids, the mounting bills, the limping economy, the geopolitical unrest—in the midst of all the storms of this life—here you are: calm, peaceful, even joyful. And the world looks at you, scratches its head, and asks with amazement, “How in the world can you be so calm with everything you’ve got going on? I just don’t understand it!” And it’s then that you can really shine like stars in the midst of the night sky (Phil 2:15) and say, “What you’re seeing is the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension guarding my heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Let me tell you more about it.”

C. A Guarding Peace

This peace is a divine peace, number one. It is a supra-rational peace. And thirdly, it is a guarding peace. This peace of God which surpasses all comprehension “will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

And this word, “guard,” is a vivid military term that referred to a *garrison*—to a “detachment of soldiers who stand guard over a city and protect it from attack” (O’Brien, 498). This would have been a familiar figure for the Philippians, who were living in a Roman colony. And throughout all the Roman colonies there would be *garrisons* stationed, precisely in order to protect the *pax*

Romana—the *peace* of Rome. And so Paul says, “Just as the Roman soldiers stand together to form a *garrison* of protection around the walls of this city in order to keep the peace, so will the peace of God itself form a *garrison* around your hearts and your minds to protect you from the pressures and anxieties that would press upon you.”

Why your hearts and minds? This is a way of referring to the whole inner person—both the thoughts of the mind and the affections and dispositions of the heart. Now, I find this to be extremely valuable insight into God’s own view of the psychology of anxiety. Why would Paul say that the peace of God will guard our *hearts and minds*? Why wouldn’t he say that it would guard our neurons and amygdalas? Our hormones and neurotransmitters? I’m being a tad facetious, but the truth is still the same. Paul identifies anxiety, here, as an issue fundamentally of the *heart* and *mind*. At its root, anxiety is a *spiritual* problem. Now, there might be physical *factors* that accompany it (and especially that *result* from it, as research would indicate). But modern psychiatry’s attempts to classify anxiety as a *disease* is starkly at odds with the implications of this verse. The cure for anxiety is not merely balanced brain chemistry; we need a garrison over our *hearts* and *minds* precisely because anxiety is a *spiritual* problem.

Whatever has your heart has you. Is that fair to say? Whatever has your heart has you: **for out of the heart flow the issues of life**, Proverbs 4:23. And whatever has your mind has you: **as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he** (Prov 23:7) (cf. Martin). “**The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and,**” what? “**Peace**” (Rom 8:6). And so if the heart and the mind are precisely where anxiety attacks, then we need a fortified garrison around both, so that we might be kept from sin, whether in thought or in desire. And that is precisely what we are promised in this verse.

Conclusion: In Christ Jesus

But oh, we mustn’t forget the final phrase, because this makes all the difference. We know where this peace comes from—it’s from God—and we know what we’re to do to get it—to pray with thanksgiving. But *where* is this peace found? Look at the final three words of our passage: **the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**. And this makes all the difference in the world.

People search for peace in the attainment of sinful pleasures. They search for peace in between the pages of a self-help book. They search for peace in the bottom of a bottle of pills, or in the bottom of a bottle of alcohol. They search for peace within the dark, cavernous recesses of their own corrupt hearts. Some even search for peace in their own good works, laboring for the good of others. But peace is found in none of those places. True peace—the peace of God; the peace which surpasses all comprehension; the peace that can truly and effectively guard your hearts and minds from anxiety—is **in Christ Jesus**, and in Christ Jesus alone.

I know that as you listen to God's Word preached this morning, some of you sit there despairing. You say to yourselves, "Oh, if that only were possible for me! If only that kind of life of perennial joy, of humble gentleness, of anxiety-free peaceful living—if only that were available to me! But it can't be. I've tried. I've tried for years to be joyful. I've tried for years to be gentle. I've tried for years to find the peace you're talking about! But it's impossible!" Well yes indeed, that kind of life is impossible—*outside* of Christ. Apart from a vital union with the Lord Jesus Christ, entered into by grace through faith alone, *none* of this is possible. Christ Himself said, "**Apart from Me you can do *nothing***" (John 15:5).

But *in* Christ, it *is* possible. In union with Christ, this peace *is* possible. And if you find yourself destitute of this peace this morning, perhaps it is because you are destitute of this Christ this morning. And if you find stirring within your breast a sort of holy attraction to this life of peace—and I pray you are, even if that attraction is mixed with despair—if that attraction is stirring within you such that you find yourself saying, "Oh I want that! I want it so bad!"—I just bid you to come to Christ, in whom all peace is found. The Bible calls Him **the Lord of peace** (2 Thess 3:16). Elsewhere it says explicitly, "**for He Himself *is* our peace**" (Eph 2:14). And in still another place we're told that it is the **peace of Christ** which rules in our hearts (Col 3:15).

Jesus Himself said, "**These things I have spoke to you, so that *in Me* you may have peace.**" Oh friend don't make the mistake of thinking that you can have peace *from* God before you have had peace *with* God through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you would have the peace *of* God this morning, make peace *with* God this morning by turning from your sin, abandoning all hope of commending yourself to God on the basis of your own righteousness, and put your trust entirely in the righteousness of another: the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And my brothers and sisters, those who along with me, by grace, have fled to Christ for grace and peace, *this* is where spiritual stability is found. Pursue it ever and only here, in Christ, and in worshipful, dependent, confident prayer to our Father through Him, and be anxious for nothing.