

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

8/23/26 PM Service

Sermon Text: Philippians 4:4-7

Sermon Title: Anxiety and the God of All Peace

Phil 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

Phil 4:5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

Phil 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Phil 4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Main Point: Anxiety is defeated when believers surrender control to God through prayerful, thankful trust.

Outline:

1. Anxiety's Source
2. Anxiety's Enemy

Introduction

Several years ago I experienced real, deep, long-lasting anxiety. The sort of long sustained season of worry that I didn't know I was capable of. Before this happened, I thought I was immune. I was such a chill, trusting, relaxed person that I really believed anxiety was not and would not be an issue for me, but I was wrong.

And it began to affect my health. I even went in for a heart scan because I was convinced that my anxiety had morphed into an actual heart problem (it hadn't).

Now, the order of the day for all of us is to put on a brave face: keep calm and carry on, and especially not to open up about our feelings of anxiety, because if we do that then suddenly everyone will know that we're not these all-knowing, in-control sorts of people. That we don't have it all together the way we want people to think. Instead of transparency we want to project power and competence, and telling others about our anxiety doesn't help so much with that much.

And so we try to manage. And we hold it in. And the anxiety actually increases because the pressure to put on a brave face increases.

Some of you will know what I'm talking about better than others. Many of you have known quite intimately the powerful temptation toward anxiety. For others of you anxiety may be something that you hear about but haven't experienced much for yourself. Maybe a little worrying here and there, but nothing overwhelming.

The important thing to know this evening is that **we are all tempted to be anxious**. And Paul in his letter to the Philippians confronts it head on in this passage. Paul isn't giving a comprehensive theology of anxiety here today, but he is putting an arrow in your quiver for the battle against worry in your own life.

Because whatever you have been told about anxiety... whatever you believe about it in your own life, Paul wants to help us to do battle against it.

So this evening I have two points: Anxiety's source, and Anxiety's enemy. Two points.

1. Anxiety's Source

The first point today is Anxiety's source. Paul begins in verse 4 by giving an overarching goal here: he wants to see God's people in a constant state of rejoicing. But he also acknowledges that it's difficult to rejoice when you've become overwhelmed by feelings of worry. And so in verse

6 Paul says very explicitly, “do not be anxious about anything.” Know this from the beginning: **Anxiety isn’t God’s ideal for us.** Paul tells us quite the contrary, don’t be anxious.

I am not telling you to beat yourself up, or to dig yourself an even deeper hole. I’m simply telling you that we have to begin by telling ourselves the truth from God’s word: “Do not be anxious.”

Our God knows us. He is understanding, he’s caring, he understands that we’re flesh – that we’re weak – but at the end of the day he didn’t design us to be anxious creatures who carry around this ongoing illusion that we are in charge of all of this... that if we just worry enough, the problem will be solved. Instead he designed us to be trusting creatures who live under the Father’s sovereign hand.

He tells us not only that we shouldn’t be anxious, but that we shouldn’t be anxious about anything. This is a hard command for us to swallow. I think most of us have a threshold of panic or worry, and we believe that there’s a certain amount of trouble in our lives where we are allowed to feel anxiety...maybe when things get really bad. But Paul says, “No. Nothing. Don’t be anxious about anything.”

This is where many of us may say, “You know Paul... you don’t know me. Anxiety isn’t something I have control over. It’s totally out of my control.”

But the truth of the matter is that anxiety is a temptation, just *like lust* is a temptation. It’s a temptation just *like hatred* or *stealing*. Anxiety is a temptation that presents itself to us all the time. Sometimes we yield to it.

All of us are different some of us are tempted to anxiety by different things. Finances. Jobs. Marriage. Children. Relationships.

And one of the sources of anxiety in our lives is that we let a good, biblical, reasonable concern morph into unbiblical, untrusting worry.

We need to know the difference between worry (or anxiety) and concern. Anxiety is always sinful. I know that may not be encouraging if

you are a person who struggles with worry. Concern, on the other hand, isn't sinful.

The difference between worry and concern is trust. When problems and troubles present themselves, our impulse may be to dive into our own hearts and our own selves and seek out the answer. That's when concern crosses the line into worry and anxiety.

Jesus speaks to this in Matthew 6:27 where he says, "which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

What do we do here? We take on ourselves the imaginary responsibility to guide and direct the universe, and we start to believe that sheer willpower and grinding the gears of our heart against the situation will make things different. But all that really results from this is a deeply unsettled agony within. We do this to ourselves.

Anxiety is a temptation, and like so many sins, it never delivers on its promises. Jesus says, it doesn't work. It doesn't improve or lengthen your life.

Anxiety is the temptation to carry our concerns around with us and refusing to trust that they're in the right hands already with God.

As painful as it is to say, this source of anxiety is a lack of trust in God, and a misplaced trust in ourselves.

In its most potent form, Anxiety comes from the very real conviction that we think we would do better if we could only be in God's place.

2. Anxiety's Enemy

When you're overcome by anxiety, you've been overcome by a lie. And the only cure for the lie is the truth. And this is point two: anxiety's enemy.

I just said in the previous point that anxiety's source, if you trace it down all the way, is in the sin of distrust of God. **Our anxiety finds a field to bloom in because our hearts are not quite well.**

And so the first step towards doing battle with anxiety is seeing the truth that this feeling isn't right, natural, helpful, or good.

Now, I could see you, if you're sitting there and you're the anxious type, saying "Why are you telling me this? It's just making me feel more awful and anxious." But Paul isn't going for that reaction here. That's not how he hopes the Philippians will respond, and it's not how he wants us to respond.

Think of it like when you have a terrible diagnosis. You go to the doctor, you know something's wrong, and the doctor says to you, "Well all this bacon you're eating is killing you; from now on you need to eat a well-balanced diet." On the one hand you might feel bad that your food consumption has brought you to such a serious place. You might feel bad, you might feel guilty. On the other hand, it should feel good to know what has been causing you all these problems.

Paul's answer to the struggle of anxiety isn't for us to guilt ourselves, either. Pushing ourselves and guiltting ourselves only increases the fear, the worry, and the self-focus if we aren't confronting our anxiety with a greater hope.

So what's the answer to anxiety?

The answer is learning to hand over the reigns of the universe to God.

To do that, we have to admit that we haven't been doing very well in this role. When we're anxious we've been trying to control it all and carry it all. How much good has our worry or anxiety done for us beyond giving us a gut ache?

In Scripture one of the most powerful things that followers of God do is speak to their own hearts. Psalm 42 is one of the greatest

chapters of the Bible for the person who struggles with depression and worry.

I'm not saying the answers are easy or that they come automatically just by reading something, but the Biblical author in Psalm 42 looks at his situation and talks to his own heart: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him." And over and over again the Psalmist speaks the truth to himself and finds nourishment in the very nature and character of God. The remedy to the lie is to speak the truth aloud for the good of our soul.

Believer, we have to be willing to confront ourselves and practice real honesty with ourselves. The Psalmist does this in Psalm 139(:23-24) when he says, "search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there is any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

Are you willing to have God confront your anxiety head on the next time it rears its head? Where is this coming from? What's causing this?

When we're anxious, what we're trying to do is control something that's totally outside of our power. It's us... trying to slip ourselves into the place that God occupies. And worse yet anxiety stems from a belief deep down, whether we think about it or not, that if we could be put in charge of the universe that we would do a better job than God. That his priorities and desires aren't as reliable or trustworthy as ours.

But what does Paul say about anxiety here tonight? He says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

There's Paul's answer. He says, "Don't be anxious, but pray."

You think Paul doesn't understand? You think he doesn't know about anxiety? We aren't special in our own day. A book came out a few years

ago called *The Age of Anxiety*. And modern folks tend to think that THIS is the age of anxiety, that nobody understands anxiety quite like we do. But if you think anxiety is a uniquely modern problem, you're just wrong.

Ancient life was difficult and stressful. Now that it's over we look back with rose colored glasses and assume it was pleasant in retrospect, but every day was centered around finding something to eat, finding work to do, raising children, staying clean, finding safe water to drink, and just generally living around other sinners. The life expectancy was abysmally low. The infant mortality of those days are unimaginable by our standards. Some scholars calculate that the average life span in the time of Paul would have been only about 35 years.

That sort of life would be filled with endless temptations to worry all the time. It was enough of an issue for the Philippians that Paul had to talk about it here.

And since the problem isn't uniquely modern, remember also that the solution is also not uniquely modern.

Paul presents prayer as a solution to combat anxiety. Why prayer? What's so potent about prayer? Well look at the text.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

Now listen to how it works:

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Paul says that when you pray the Holy Spirit does something in your heart and mind. He brings peace. And I'm not talking about a Buddhist type of serenity where you forget your troubles. **Prayer is about learning to trust God with our worries, not forget about them.**

Part of the answer to how prayer works to help anxiety is that prayer takes aim directly at the heart of our worry: **prayer places us in a position of needy trust, of yielding ourselves and our own sense of power.**

People today think that if they can just be happy then their anxiety will go away. But don't you see? Anxious people are already chasing happiness and it's like trying to grab smoke. **The antidote to anxiety isn't happiness. It's restful, trusting, prayerful faith.** We try to lead with happiness, but the real answer is to live with ongoing trust.

And what that means is that in a faithless age we should expect anxiety would be on the rise. Which is in fact what we do see.

Conclusion

I understand anxiety. I've known it intimately, for long, sustained seasons.

I say that so that you know... I'm speaking to you out of experience. I've been through it. I'm not saying the anxiety I've known is worse than anyone else's. We're still all different, and surely the temptations we each face vary from person to person.

I can speak from my own experience that the sort of dread and anxiety that I have experienced has always been helped by a prayerful emptying and unburdening of myself before God. I know the unrelenting onslaught of anxiety. I know **the lies anxiety tells:**

“there is no answer coming. You'll never figure a way out of this. You have to figure this out for yourself. There is no help coming. You're all alone.”

Every single one of these thoughts is a tool of Satan. **Because each time we believe them, the very heart of faith and trust in God is attacked.**

It's in those times when we believe those lies that we forget the truth: the God who is ready to lift those burdens is right there ready for you to

Speak to him. He's ready to lift your fears, cares, and concerns if you're ready to hand them over. And not as a formality, but really hand them over.

Let's pray.