

## **Supplications with Thanksgiving**

**11/19/2023**

### **Scripture 1: (Phil. 4:4-7 ESV)**

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

## Sermon:

“It's the most wonderful time of the year! ....” But sadly, for many people it is not. This time of year is filled with so many things, so much busy-ness, so many different stressors that everything becomes overwhelming for just about everyone. We have so many demands placed upon our time, our attention, and our wallets. We become nervous, angry, fearful, sad, and especially we become anxious for no good reason at all. We take our eyes off of what is most important: Jesus Christ, the ultimate reason for the season; however, I actually do not mean Christmas but as our Creator and Provider; and instead focus on the things which may be important for a moment but not for eternity. Family, charity, acts of love, even church are all very important and worthy of our attention, so long as we remember why they are important: because of God and all that He has done; and not attribute them importance in their own right.

It is so easy to forget exactly why this season is so wonderful, or why it should be, and thus we allow the world to distract us and change our daily attitude. We abandon our habit of having a proper perspective towards God, His providence, and all of the many ways in which He blesses our lives. Therefore many of us end up suffering from anxiety, depression, or worse.

Yes, it is true that there are certain medical, chemical, and physiological reasons and effects for those emotional states but there is also a spiritual component and influence to them as well. It is my opinion, that the spiritual component is the greater or stronger cause, but that could also be just my Pastoral bias showing.

I know and I believe that prayer is a critical help with these issues, but rarely do they improve by our prayers alone. We need divine assistance and sometimes that intervention comes through the efforts and knowledge of other people, like physicians and psychologists {an entirely separate field of application from psychiatrists; psychology usually has some value in describing and recognizing mental trends and issues}, or merely kindness and help from friends or even strangers. Anxiety, depression, and other similar concerns have physical and mental components as well as spiritual and if you, or someone you know, struggles with any of them then I encourage you and implore you to not only seek divine assistance through prayer, but to also seek qualified medical care and treatment and that you precisely follow your doctor's instructions.

We Christians believe that God often works through people. He has given us the ability, knowledge, wisdom, and discernment to do what is best or necessary in particular situations {God is the necessary first and primary cause of all other derivative effects} for the good of most. So, even though a person contrived different medications and a doctor prescribes it, that does not make it any less the work of God nor does that reduce or denigrate the power of His miraculous healing, or remove the necessity of our proper response in giving God the glory; by being thankful to both Him and his human agents {even if they were such unknowingly}.

Now in Scripture, the most common command given is some variation of “Do not be afraid!” or “Fear not!”, but the next most frequent, I think, at least within the New Testament is, “Do not be anxious.” (Matt 6:25-34, 10:19; Mark 13:11; Luke 10:41, 12:11, 12:22-34; 1 Cor 7:32-35; Phil 2:28 (Paul telling himself to not feel anxious), 4:6). Anxiety is a very real thing and it is a very concerning problem because it is an emotion, or an emotional state, which every human person experiences from time to time whether we are willing to admit it.

The American Psychological Association defines “Anxiety”<sup>1</sup> as:

“...an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such

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1 <https://www.apa.org/topics/anxiety>

as sweating, trembling, dizziness, or a rapid heartbeat. Anxiety is not the same as fear, but they are often used interchangeably. Anxiety is considered a future-oriented, long-acting response broadly focused on a diffuse threat, whereas fear is an appropriate, present-oriented, and short-lived response to a clearly identifiable and specific threat.”

Does that sound like anything you have ever experienced? Do you ever feel anxious? It is OK and safe for you to admit it, even and especially here, within and among the Body of Christ.

Now while “do not be anxious” is a command of Christ, it is not a moral commandment and as such, feeling anxious is not something that is sinful, because it is an emotional response to different issues. However, our anxiety may become sinful, if we allow it. Our anxiety becomes sinful when we dwell upon it, or whatever we think is causing it, to the exclusion of all other things. When we allow our anxiety to become the principal focus, we lose our spiritual sight of Jesus Christ and thus drift away from the foundation of His cross. Thus, anxiety or its' cause can become our accidental idol, for it is certainly not one anybody would choose to serve.

Anxiety is a very human problem. It is a problem that we all suffer because of the satanic temptation to sin. Let us look back to the Garden of Eden and Eve's conversation with the Serpent, where we can see the the first example of anxiety being made manifest.

*“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"*

*And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"*

*But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” (Gen. 3:1-6 ESV)*

When the serpent asked, “Did God actually say...?” he surely caused tension and doubt to enter into Eve's mind, prompting her to respond with her understanding of the divine command given to her by Adam. {Compare Jesus's temptation in the wilderness dialogue to this. Satan tried to twist God's words, as he did here before Eve, and like her Jesus responded to him and refuted him by properly using God's words (Matthew 4), using God's actual words and not a creative reinterpretation of them.}.

Yet again, building upon the initial seed of her doubt, the serpent told her, “*You will not surely die. ...you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*”, thereby generating anxiety within her. Causing certain anxious thoughts to intrude upon her mind.

- Did God tell us the truth?
- Can we really trust God?
- Are we not already “like” God? {Are we not made in His Image?}
- Why is God keeping this knowledge of “good and evil” from us?

If she really was having questions like those running through her mind, then it becomes very difficult to not imagine Eve as feeling anxious. Surely she was also experiencing the physical symptoms of anxiety like elevated blood pressure, sweating, a rapid heart beat, trembling, and perhaps even dizziness.

So, she had to make a choice. Eve made a conscious choice in that instance, making the best choice that she believed would end this terrible feeling of anxiousness and stop her physical symptoms.

- She chose to know instead of remaining in innocent ignorance.
- She chose to know whether or not she was right to doubt God's Word.
- She chose to know the difference between good and evil, so that she would not need to wonder what evil is and be bothered so.

Through her choice, she learned that God is trustworthy and that she was wrong to doubt Him. She learned what evil is and knowing that, she also knew that she had cause to fear God's wrath because she knew that she was now evil in His sight and deserving of death, just as God had promised.

But remember, she was not alone in this sin, in her cosmic treason. Eve does not solely bear the guilt for her transgression, because Adam was right there beside her the whole time; because “...*she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*”. He could have and he should have stopped her, but he did not.

I am sure that the same anxious feelings which went through her mind, also went through his. Silence was his consent and it signaled his agreement with her choice and making the responsibility of it, his own. It was his responsibility to stop her, to stand up for God against the lies of the Devil, but instead he chose to not trust God. He chose wanting something other than what he presently had, above his allegiance to His Creator, God, and King. They sinned together, under Adam's federal authority, with his full agreement, consent, approval, and participation and thus all of humanity, including us, fell with them.

- Was their doubt sin? No.
- Was their anxiousness sin? No.
- But, when they chose to indulge their anxiety through choosing to not trust God, to violate His commandment, because of their anxious feelings, then it did become sin. Their anxiety became sinful when they chose to allow it to rule over their life, instead of trusting God's love and provision as their King.

That is the kind of problematic choice which the Apostle Paul was addressing for the Philippian church when he wrote, “...*do not be anxious about anything...*”.

Really, why do we feel this way? What is the ultimate cause or reason for our feelings of anxiety?

We feel anxious because of a sense of dis-satisfaction and/or ingratitude. We become anxious because we think or feel like we are lacking something that we ought to have, as Eve felt like she needed to know both Good and Evil.

- This goes for the anxiety a person might feel before they speak in front of a crowd (Luke 12:11).
- This goes for the anxiety a person might feel when wondering how they are going to pay their bills, or where their next meal will come from (Matt 6:25-34).

- This goes for the anxiety a person might feel when they are in a crowd or among a group of people and they feel entirely out of place, feeling as if they do not belong there (Luke 12:25-28).

What do each of those circumstances have in common?

- Dwelling upon uncertainties.
- Lacking confidence in ourselves and demonstrating a lack of trust in the LORD, in His gracious provision and in His covenant promise to be with us.
- Allowing the fires of our own felt inadequacies to be fueled by envy, jealousy, or covetousness by concerning ourselves more with what other people have, than by choosing to be satisfied with all the blessings which God has already given to us.

All of these are symptoms of dissatisfaction, ingratitude, and unthankfulness; however, through these symptoms our anxiety is also meant to be a natural reminder of our total dependence on God, on Jesus Christ; to help us be more humble; to keep us from believing that we are “All That!”; to keep us from falsely believing that we are capable of managing our own affairs and sustaining ourselves indefinitely by our own effort and hard work, alone.

Anxiety is sourced in that false Sola, “Sola Boot-strappa”, because eventually we all realize that our laces are far too short and that we will not get very far on our own.

Anxiety ultimately comes from the selfish feelings which we feel; because these emotions tell us that everything is all about us, especially when we are more concerned about what other people think about us.

Jesus Himself told us to not be anxious, and He gave us a lot of good reasons for why we should not be anxious, “*Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*” (Matt. 6:25-26 ESV), proving His point by asking “*And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?*” (Lk. 12:25-26 ESV).

However, although Jesus explained **why** we should not be anxious, it seems like He neglected (in the Gospels) to tell us **how** to not be anxious. But fortunately for us, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul gives us the answer to our problem. “*...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*”

The clear and simple answer for our anxiety is to ask God for help; to pray to the LORD with thanksgiving in our heart for His good providence.

Now this advice of Paul's could be wrongly interpreted as being a “Name it and Claim it!” theology. That would suggest that when we pray and ask God for something, if we are being thankful while we pray, because we assume that God will give us whatever we want, then surely He must grant our request because we are thankful.

If you pray and ask, and if you are thankful because you assume that God will going to say “Yes”, then merely because you asked and showed your gratitude in advance, then God has to give you what you want because through your thanksgiving, you have somehow placed God in your debt. Now that is absolute nonsense, but sadly a lot of people have been misled into believing that Jesus and the LORD are transactional, like that.

Or, we could wrongly interpret Paul's advice as just “Let Go and Let God!”, as if we have no personal responsibility for ourselves. Although God **does not** “help those who help themselves”, He also does not help those who refuse to participate with Him. Through Paul to the Thessalonians, the Holy Spirit says “*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.*” (2 Thess. 3:10-12 ESV). So, we are obligated to work along with God in the alleviation of our anxiety. We get to participate with Him. We have a part to play because He will not just take care of it for us.

But how do we rightly interpret what Paul is telling us? How do we properly put his advice into action so that we are not anxious?

- Step One: We must pray. We need to stop and make all of our requests known to God. We must ask before we can ever hope to receive.
- Step Two: We need to be thankful. Period. Full Stop. We need to be thankful now. We need to be thankful, not because we hope or expect that God will answer our prayers with a “Yes”. We need to be thankful with what we have now, right now, for all that we have. If we are not thankful for what we already have, then we will never be thankful if we get more than what we already have because:
  - Those who are thankful with very little, will be thankful with very much.
  - Those who are not thankful with what they already have, as much or as little as it may be, will never be thankful with anything at all.

That is what Paul is trying to get into us. He is trying to instill and encourage a spirit of thankfulness within us; a spirit of satisfaction and gratitude. He is encouraging us to first be content, so that then, we will not have this problem of being anxious. By telling us to pray “*with thanksgiving*” Paul is trying to help us to retrain our hearts, so that whenever you start feeling anxious you will stop and “Count your Blessings” (Edwin Excel, d. 1921). When you start feeling anxious then you will stop and remember all that Christ has already given to you and be grateful to Him. So that when you feel anxious, you will pause to consider and ask yourself “Why am I being anxious, really?”

Why do I feel anxious? Because I do not think that I have something that I should. Because I think I am missing something important, something which I feel like I need. That is how we start to feel ungracious, because we become unhappy and dissatisfied with what we have now. When we become envious of others, we begin to covet: we want what they have; we want to be more like them; or maybe, we might even want to become them.

Unless we do as Paul advises, unless we turn to the LORD with “prayer and supplication”, anxiety can lead us into all of the other moral sins because these feelings may inspire us to lie, cheat, and steal from others, or to even kill other people and take what is rightfully theirs; just to satisfy our selfish, sinful nature, and alleviate our anxiousness at the cost of violence to others.

So, do not be anxious. Do not be anxious about anything!

Do you now see why this is such an important command of Christ for us to intentionally try and obey, not just for our own sake but for the sake of others?

After Paul warns us against indulging our anxiety, and after he instructs us in the proper, Godly way of managing it, he then informs us of what it is like on the far side of our anxiety, which is his main point “*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”.

Clearly, Paul does not tell us that if we pray with an attitude of thankfulness, God will necessarily give us what we want; instead he knows that God has already given us what we most truly need, “*the peace of God*”.

Anxiety, in other words, is: a felt absence of peace; a felt lack of wholeness; and it comes from a felt lack of communion with, *koinonia*, or a closeness of relationship with Jesus Christ, God our Father, and the Holy Spirit.

Christians are most apt to suffer this feeling with God whenever we forget or ignore our thankfulness because doing so, we put up a wall or barrier within our relationship to Christ, but He does not ever move away from us {this is part of what is really meant by “quench the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19). Jesus said, “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*” (Jn. 14:27 ESV). You do not need to be anxious because Christ has given you His peace. It dwells within you, because you are filled with the Person of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, because of His peace, you do not need to be afraid either!

Paul describes the “*peace of God*” as surpassing “*all understanding*” and we cannot hope to fathom all of the benefits which we receive from His peace yet, but this is one benefit that we can know and be grateful for.

Whenever we feel anxious and we pray with thanksgiving to God, we open the door and reach out to Him, boldly approaching His throne of grace (Heb 4:14-16). We knock down the walls of our self-assurance and self-reliance which we build around ourselves, and we let God's peace flow around us, flow into us, and fill us to displace and remove our anxiety because His peace guards, protects, and defends our “*hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” by our union into Him. Through this union, the Spirit helps us to better trust God: to trust His plan and to remain confident in His provision for us. Therefore, we pray with thanksgiving, not in anticipation or hope of what God might do for us, but because of what He has already done.

If you trust in Jesus Christ, then He has already answered your prayer. He has already filled you with His Holy Spirit, to comfort you and to ease your anxiety, when you allow Him to. That is why we get to pray in this way, to pray thankfully, because what God has done for us already and because of all that He has already given to us is far greater than anything that we could possibly hope for, and His Sovereign Grace more than makes up for any lack that we believe we presently feel. If you have Jesus Christ, then truly you have all that you need; you have everything that ultimately matters.

But, none of that really seems to matter all that much or seems to really help if you are anxious because you are actually in immediate need since you lack things that you actually need, like: food, safe shelter, warm clothing, and appropriate medical care. What good does your faith seem to do for you then? I expect that if you have ever been in that kind of need, that you would probably answer from out of that moment, “Not a whole lot”. That is a kind of circumstance when many people are tempted to surrender and give up their faith in Christ, instead of surrendering their faith to Jesus.

God is Good and God is Gracious and Merciful. I am certain that we have all heard positive stories about individuals in those kind of circumstances, people who had their faith confirmed, renewed, and restored through kindness from a stranger; because they received a miraculous and unexpected provision from the LORD; something which would seem ordinary to us, but was simply extraordinary for them.

God does not work because of our faith, nor does He not work on account of our lack of faith. Instead our faith allows us to see God working in and through the lives of others, whether they recognize it or not: to satisfy our needs, to calm our fears, and to soothe our anxious minds with His divine peace.

James, the brother of Jesus wrote about this side of things and it has always been something of a challenge for us, “*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?*” (Jas. 2:14-16 ESV). We usually think about that statement from the perspective of the missional minded Christian, the one who proves their faith by “going and doing”, but I want you to think about it now from the other side of the table because not only are we to “...*not be anxious...*” ourselves, we get to not be anxious ourselves. I want you to now think about that from the side of the person in need, the one who is lacking and whom we would say is justifiably anxious. I want us to think about how our missional works of good will and charity are used by Christ to alleviate the anxiety of others.

- To them, the one who gives is an answer to their prayer.
- To them, the one who shows compassion and loves them is an angel from the Lord.
- To them, through their receiving, their faith in Jesus Christ and their trust in God's provision may be confirmed and strengthened.
- To them, through their receiving, they may have their anxiety and their fears assuaged so that they may now better rest in the “*peace of God, which surpasses all understanding*”.

Through these works that we do on account of our faith, by our *pisteuo* in Christ Jesus, others may come to believe or better trust in Him. Through these works we do by faith, we can help them to “...*not be anxious...*” and then we get to share with them why and how they should not need to be that kind of anxious again.

Only through our empowerment by the Holy Spirit can we do these works of faith. It is only by cooperating with Him that we get to participate in sharing God's grace in mercy to others. Also, it is only by their cooperation with the Holy Spirit, by their trust that God will provide for them somehow, that those in need will be rescued from their anxiety; even if they do not yet know Jesus, or do not understand what it is that they are actually hoping for.

We are not so different from them, even in the midst of our plenty, with all of our many obvious blessings. We all suffer from anxiety. We all have access to the same solution for anxiety. We must all surrender ourselves and acknowledge that while we may not have all that we might want, we do truly have what we need. Therefore we must be thankful for what we already have, and then we must trust that someone else: God, Jesus, or Christians acting in His Name; will act and come beside us, to help us know and rest in the “*peace of God*”.

So, how do we put our anxiety to rest? How do we “*not be anxious*”?

- Through prayer.
- Through our trust and faith in the LORD Jesus Christ.
- Through being thankful for all that He has done for all of us: given us life, given us this beautiful world to live in, given us our family and friends; plus all that He has done for the Elect, His people chosen in adopting love: salvation, the forgiveness of our sin, a restored relationship with Him, and our progressive sanctification and conformity to His perfect and holy image.



- Through the gift of Jesus Christ: His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and present reign over us.

We all have something to be thankful to the LORD for, even those of us who have the least, because “*What do you have that you did not receive?*” (1 Cor. 4:7 ESV); because all that we have is sourced from God.

Thankfulness is an attitude of intention. It is a purposeful mindset. Therefore, choosing to be thankful, especially choosing to be grateful to your Creator, is the first and the best way to be preserved from the anxiety that leads to sin.

So beloved, do not be anxious. But, if and when the feeling comes upon you, then pray to the LORD God, because He is your best and only true help. Be thankful. Remember and consider all that He has done and given for you, from Creation until now. Think on the life and death of His only begotten son, given so that you may live with Him forever, and the peace of God will protect you and keep you from allowing anxiety to lead you into sin.

Offer your prayers with supplication and thanksgiving to the LORD, Jesus Christ, and through His peace you will remember why your troubles, concerns, and worries should not be so troubling because:

- you trust that God, the Creator of heaven, earth, and everything in between is Sovereign and is in control;
- you trust that He loves you and cares enough for you that He gave Himself, He gave up His Son Jesus, for your sake;
- you trust that the God who has provided for you thus far, will continue to provide you with all that you need in this life and in the next.

So, do not be anxious. Instead trust God and rest in His peace, the peace which surpasses all understanding.

**AMEN**