

## How to deal with anxiety!

### Introduction:

The late Dr. Billy Graham wrote the following words in 1965 – he said: “Historians will probably call our era “the age of anxiety.”

Who would have known that his words would be very true in 2020 – 55 years later. The dictionary tells us that anxiety is: “a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome.”

I’m not an expert on the symptoms of someone who experiences anxiety, but here are some of the most basic symptoms according to a psychological website:

- People who are anxious will have feelings of nervousness, restlessness or tenseness.
- They will experience a sense of impending danger, panic or doom.
- People who experience anxiety have an increased heart rate.
- They typically start breathing rapidly.
- They start sweating when they get anxious.
- They start trembling.
- They feel weak or tired or overwhelmed by something they don’t even know are real.
- They have trouble concentrating.
- They try to think about anything other than the present situation – but without avail.
- They have trouble sleeping.
- They experience digestive problems.
- They struggle to control their worries and fears.
- They withdraw from people because they want to avoid things that causes anxiety in them.

In today’s society these symptoms are common. I believe we have all experienced some of these symptoms at some or other time in our lives.

Life is full of unknowns... Life is full of pain and suffering... Life is full of things that has the potential to scare the daylight out of us.

I believe Dr. Billy Graham was correct in his assessment in 1965 that “Historians will probably call our era “the age of anxiety.”” But – the apostle Paul had a completely different take on life – that is why he wrote to the Philippian believers about this very issue - anxiety... This is what the apostle Paul had to say:

Philippians 4:4-9 “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! (5) Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. (6) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; (7) and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (8) Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (9) The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Paul tells the Philippian believer in verse 6 (a): “Be anxious for nothing...” The word translated “anxious” is the Greek word “μεριμνάω” which means: “being anxious - to be troubled with cares about the future – or to be anxious ahead of time.”

There are people – even believers who are anxious about things which hadn’t even happen yet.

Paul tells the Philippian believers that they should be anxious for nothing. This means – not even one thing!

Instead of being anxious – Paul gave them 5 things they needed to do instead of being anxious:

### **1. First: instead of being anxious - they should rejoice in the Lord:**

Paul starts in verse 4 with the words: "Rejoice in the Lord always, Again I say rejoice!" ***Why should we rejoice in the Lord?*** – beloved – our rejoicing is because of: His strength, His wisdom, His identity, His love, His purposes, His power, His truth, His perspectives, His peace, His patience, His kindness, His gentleness, His faithfulness, etc.

Instead of being anxious – we should rejoice in the Lord for He is all we need. We are all sufficient in Christ Jesus. Rejoicing in Him – drives away anxiety.

### **2. The second thing Paul told them to do – instead of being anxious - is to be gentle in the presence of the Lord:**

Verse 5 "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand." When Paul says that the Lord is at hand – he was saying to the Philippian believers that the Lord Jesus is ever present. Because the Lord Jesus is ever present, they should be gentle to people so they can see Christ Jesus's presence through their actions.

Paul was telling the Philippian believers that they should not show anxiety – but they should rather show gentleness to others. They should be examples to others – not of people who are anxiously trying to live by relying on themselves – but they should be people who have the Lord Jesus with them and in them and because of that – they can show the gentleness of Christ (by example). Instead of being anxious – we should show gentleness - knowing that Christ is with us.

### **3. The third thing the Philippians needed to do instead of being anxious was – to pray!**

Look at verses 6-7 "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; (7) and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Anxiety and prayer are like fire and water – they do not mix. If you pray – it is equivalent to extinguishing a fire. The opposite is also true – if you don't pray – anxiety will destroy you like a fire destroys everything in its path.

Prayer is like programming our thinking, our attitudes, our spirit, and our actions...

Paul speaks about 3 kinds of prayer that will extinguish the fire of anxiety:

- **First:** Paul tells us to make our requests known to God through prayer. Prayer - may include all sorts of prayer, mental (in my mind) or vocal (aloud), private or public, ordinary or extraordinary - every part of prayer – asking God for help, asking God to intervene, Praying for a way out, praying for clarity – all kinds of prayer.
- **Second:** Paul tells us to make our requests known to God through supplication. Supplication – is bringing everything I need before God – everything I need to face the future or anything I need to be able to stand strong.
- **Third:** Paul tells us to make our requests known to God through thanksgiving. Thanksgiving – is an act of faith in God's ability to intervene. Thanksgiving is acknowledging God's mercy and grace. Thanksgiving is saying - thank you - before anything happened.

Our prayers should have all 3 of these elements in it - when we make our requests known to God – prayer, supplication and thanksgiving.

**Question:** Why should we make our requests known to God when we are anxious? When we get anxious, we tend to focus on ourselves and on our problems, which might not even be a problem yet. To pray means that I bring my requests to God and I trust in Him. I don't trust my own solutions, I trust Him to handle the issues and to give me wisdom to do what I must do.

*In verse 7 the apostle Paul tells the Philippians what God will do if they go to Him in prayer, supplication and thanksgiving:*

Verse 7 "...the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. When we are troubled by anxiety – the battle takes place in our hearts and minds. Paul wasn't making a distinction between the heart and the mind in this verse. He was referring to the complete inner person.

In Ephesians the apostle Paul speaks about the inner man. Ephesians 3:16-17 "...that He (God) would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, (17) that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith..."

*In Philippians 4* the apostle says that if we pray when we have anxiety – the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our inner man. This peace is not a feeling of peace that some try to present it ... This peace refers to God's peace – it is having peace with God. It refers to an inner calm or tranquillity because the believer knows that God can do what is best for His children.

It is an inner peace which surpasses all understanding because the believer knows inside that God is sovereignly in control of everything that happens in the universe. This peace Paul is speaking of is an inner assurance, an inner trust, an inner calmness / peace that God gives His children who come to Him in prayer, supplication and thanksgiving.

#### **4. The fourth thing the Philippians were called to do instead of being anxious was – to meditate on the right things:**

Listen again to verse 8: "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

Paul tells the Philippian believers that there are much better things to keep themselves occupied with than anxiety - related to tomorrow's problems, today's worries and general issues that they might or might not face. Paul gives them a list of things they should set our minds to – things they should think about constantly – meditate on:

John MacArthur writes the following in his commentary on Philippians 4:9 (I quote):

- i. **Meditate on things that are true.** What is true is found in God (2Ti\_2:25), in Christ (Eph\_4:20-21), in the Holy Spirit (Joh\_16:13), and in God's Word (Joh\_17:17).
- ii. **Meditate on Things that are noble.** The Greek term means "worthy of respect." Believers are to meditate on whatever is worthy of awe and adoration, i.e., the sacred as opposed to the profane.
- iii. **Meditate on Things that are just.** This refers to what is right. The believer is to think in harmony with God's divine standard of holiness.
- iv. **Meditate on Things that are pure.** That which is morally clean and undefiled.
- v. **Meditate on Things that are lovely.** The Greek term means "pleasing" or "amiable." By implication, believers are to focus on whatever is kind or gracious.
- vi. **Meditate on Things that are of good report.** That which is highly regarded or thought well of. It refers to what is generally considered reputable in the world, such as kindness, courtesy, and respect for others." (End quote)

*Paul ends his list by referring to 2 more things which should be meditated on.* First – if there be any virtue in something – think on it. Second: if there be any praise in something – think on it.

To think /meditate on things which have virtue - means that we need to think of things which are morally excellent. To be morally excellent is something that only God can do in the believer. Paul says – think / meditate on what it would look like if someone is morally excellent. (Christ Jesus was!) If I could be morally excellent – what would my life look like. If I could be morally excellent – my life would be a vessel of praise to God. If I think / meditate on things which are praiseworthy – I should be thinking of being morally excellent. If I think / meditate on all of these things – there will no time to be anxious about anything.

#### **5. The fifth thing the Philippians were told to do instead of being anxious was – to follow Paul’s example:**

Listen to Paul’s final words to the believers in Philippi: Verse 9 “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Beloved – we have the complete Word of God. We have the teachings of Paul and we have a record of his life and ministry.

Paul told the Philippian believers to:

- i. To apply what they learned from Paul
- ii. To make use the things they received from Paul
- iii. To act on the things they heard from Paul
- iv. To do the same things he did – to follow his example as he followed Christ.

Paul calls on the Philippian believers not only to think on the 8 things he mentioned in verse 8, but that they should apply what they learned from him, received from him, heard from him and saw him do – they should do the same... If they do all of these things – they will not be anxious of anything.

#### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Billy Graham also said in 1965: “Anxiety is the natural result when our hopes are centred in anything short of God and His will for us.” How should we be centred on God and His will – Paul told us in Philippians 4:4-9

1. We should always rejoice in the Lord...
2. We should always be gentle to other in the presence of the Lord...
3. We should always pray...
4. We should always meditate on the right things...
5. We should always follow Paul’s example as he followed Christ Jesus...

If we do all of this – we will not be anxious for anything.