

# Standing Firm: Anxious for Nothing

Philippians 4:6–7

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## Introduction

We live in a time when it is easy to worry. Perhaps every age is such a time. Whether it's the well-being of our families, the state of our finances, the security of our jobs, our future, our health, our relationships, the way people think about us—our society worries about everything. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that more than 40 million adults in the United States have been diagnosed with some form of anxiety disorder. That's one out of every five adults, making anxiety disorders the most common so-called “mental illness” in the country. The DSM-5 chronicles such conditions 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. That leaves little wonder that 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. Some time ago, 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. People are desperate to be free from anxiety! The world is desperate to find peace!

And in the face of all the statistics, and in the face of all of our concerns about finances, and health, and old age, and the state of the world, 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.” “Well, yeah, I understand that's the ideal, Mike, but we live in the real world. Surely God understands—” “Be anxious for nothing.” “No, I mean, I get it. Don't sweat the small stuff. But my lived experience—” No: “Be anxious for nothing.”

But God's Word doesn't only lay this duty upon our shoulders. It also strengthens our hands to perform this duty by telling us how. The world literally drives itself *crazy* looking for the cure for anxiety in positive thinking, in self-help books, in prescription medication, in commiseration with fellow-victims. But 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, in 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 steadfastness. We've read Philippians 4:1 several times now over the past few weeks: “Therefore, my beloved

brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, *in this way stand firm* in the Lord, my beloved.” And since the beginning of December, we have been studying the means of true, spiritual stability—how we as the people of God will stand firm—in a season of change and transition; in the face of a hostile culture outside the church; and even as we deal with struggles and conflicts within the church.

And in general: this is something we want! We want to be a steadfast church! As followers of Jesus, we want to be stable people! We don’t want to be shaken and thrown about by every false teaching, or persecution, or interpersonal conflict, or severe temptation, or trying affliction. We want to stand! And this passage tells us how.

Verses 2 and 3 tell us that one means of spiritual stability is **unity**. If we’re going to stand, as a church, we must be diligently devoted to preserving unity in the body of Christ. Verse 4 tells us a second means is **joy**. A steadfast church relentlessly pursues their joy in Christ. When we’re satisfied in Him—who never leaves us nor forsakes us—we won’t be tempted to be shaken by uncertain and volatile circumstances. Verse 5 speaks of **gentleness**. When the people of God devote themselves to unity by pursuing their joy in Christ, they become free to deal gently with one another. And that makes for a steadfast church.

And then in verses 6 and 7, we find a **fourth means** of cultivating spiritual stability. If we are going to stand firm in the Lord, we must also **battle all forms of anxiety by means of thankful prayer**. Let’s look at our text. 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 difficult to overstate the importance of mortifying the sin of anxiety in the Christian life. Many other sins spring from anxiety. Anxiety about others’ opinions of you can lead to lying to save face. Anxiety about finances leads to coveting, greed, stinginess, and even theft. Anxiety about health can make you impatient, irritable, and abrasive. If anxiety could be severed at its root, so many other sins would wither (cf. Piper, *Future Grace*, 53).

So much is that the case that Martyn Lloyd-Jones regards it a test of the genuineness of our faith in Christ. 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).

GraceLife, we want to be a people who answers, "Yes," to that question! Surely, we want to be able 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, in a way that is manifestly different than those who have no faith."

And so we must be equipped to engage in this battle against anxiety, and against the unbelief from which it springs. And we'll 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 prescription for 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 that prohibition—of what precisely 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 sanctioning an apathetic laziness or a whimsical foolishness 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, then, 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. We pray and we trust the sovereignty of God *as* we plan, not as a substitute for making 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, in verse 20, Paul uses this very word for anxiety when he describes Timothy's virtue. He says, "I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be *concerned* [same word] for your welfare." So the compassionate and sympathetic concern for the spiritual needs of fellow believers is a good thing. Paul is not prohibiting that. In 1 Corinthians 12:25, Paul tells us that God has given spiritual gifts to the church so that the various members would *care* for one another. And that is, again, the same word for "anxious" in Philippians 4. 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 Christian who feels no real burden for the sanctification and growth of his fellow believers, who is not in some sense anxious to meet the needs of his brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, who is not concerned for the health of the church, is derelict in his duty! Paul is not forbidding these kinds of genuine, responsible concerns for the people and affairs entrusted into one's stewardship.

Instead, the **prohibition** to be anxious for nothing speaks of what we naturally understand as anxiety. Paul is forbidding fretfulness, excessive worry—the harassing, wearying care that troubles the soul, distracts the mind, and paralyzes the hands such that duties are neglected.

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 things like, "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 legitimate place in the heart of a Christian.

And this teaching is simply an echo of the teaching of Jesus Himself. Turn with me to Matthew 6. In the middle of the Sermon on the Mount—the declaration from the King Himself about what it means to be a subject of His Kingdom—Jesus spends ten whole 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? <sup>26</sup>Look 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? <sup>27</sup>And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? <sup>28</sup>And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, <sup>29</sup>yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. <sup>30</sup>But 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! <sup>31</sup>Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' <sup>32</sup>For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup>But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. <sup>34</sup>So 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. It's not "just worrying." It's a failure to believe in the promises of God, Worrying is unbelief. And so we are commanded to be anxious for *nothing*, because we have a Heavenly Father who is sovereign over *everything*, down to making sure the birds find food and the flowers grow beautifully.

The **prohibition** is exhaustive: no matter what combination of difficult circumstances we find ourselves in, we are not to indulge feelings of sinful anxiety. You say, "Easy for you to say, Mike!" I didn't write this, friends. Paul wrote this command. And he wasn't sipping cocktails by the pool when he wrote it. He was under house arrest, chained to a Roman soldier 24 hours a day, awaiting 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! "Certainly if he can be anxious for nothing, we can be anxious for nothing. We have the same God, the same Christ, the same promises!"

And that needs to have the same effect on you, GraceLife. It is a command from the Word of God that is just as binding as, "You shall not steal," "You shall not commit adultery," and "You shall not murder." People balk at the notion that anxiety is a sin, but when the Word of God commands, "Be anxious for nothing," and you are anxious for something, there is no other way to say it: that is disobedience to that command.

But you say, "Mike, how can Paul say that? In this fallen world? In this world plagued with untreatable diseases, and healthcare shortages, and collapsing economies, and job layoffs, and increased cost of living, and the need to provide for my family?" And here, friends, you need to recall the great doctrine of biblical inspiration. Yes, it was Paul who gave this command, but it wasn't only Paul who gave this command. Paul is the human author of the Epistle to the Philippians, but it is the Triune God Himself who is its divine Author. And surely our God knows about these circumstances! Surely these concerns have not escaped the consideration of our perfectly-wise, infinitely compassionate God!

But in the face of all of those very *real* concerns—in full consciousness of all the trials of life in a broken world, even the very trials that you are presently facing—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)

You say, “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**. Number one: the prohibition. Number **two**: **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.

See, the reason we’re 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 in an attempt to control the things we can’t control, we worry about them. “I will think about every possible permutation for these circumstances until my mind fully comprehends it!” It gives the illusion of control. But Paul teaches us in this text that the antidote for anxiety comes not by retreating within our own minds in search of the illusion of control, but from presenting our petitions to the sovereign God of the universe—who actually 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, 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 our Father, who delights to give good gifts to His children (Matt 7:11), who causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28), whose good pleasure, Jesus says, is to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32). John 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 1 Peter 5:7: “...casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

Back in Philippians 4, notice the triple emphasis in verse 6. Paul piles three words for prayer one right on top of the other. He speaks of *prayer*, *supplication*, and *requests*. There’s no mistaking Paul’s point here: the antidote for anxiety is the kind of petitionary prayer that makes specific requests of our Heavenly Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy

Spirit. This prayer that is the pathway to peace is not a sort of semi-conscious 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 paganism—an Eastern mysticism baptized in the polluted waters of Western narcissism. That's Oprah and Osteen, not Paul and Peter.

But peace is not to be found within ourselves. You'd think that would be somewhat self-evident. The whole reason you're looking for peace is because you discern its absence in yourself. Inside of you is where the anxiety is! Looking for peace by pressing more deeply into the caverns of your own sinful heart is something like pressing further into a cave in search of light, or further into the ocean in search of dry ground. You see, the world flatters itself into the delusion that our problems are outside of us, and that the solution is inside of us. But Scripture tells us that our problems are inside of us, and the solution is outside of us.

And so Paul tells us that for peace, we have to go outside of ourselves to God. He requires that we make these specific requests 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. As the psalmist says in Psalm 94:19, “When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul.” The cure for anxiety is the sweet divine comfort that our Heavenly Father ministers to us as we commune with Him in Scripture-saturated prayer.

So the cure for anxiety, friends, will not be found within ourselves. I remember, early in 2020, nobody knew whether Covid was going to be a mild flu or a reiteration of the black plague, but, of course, many assumed it would be the latter. And in the face of that, people were just totally deluding themselves. They were saying things like, “You got this!” I saw that all over the place. “Think positive! You got this! The American spirit will defeat this disease!” Just: looking themselves in the mirror and lying straight to their own faces, hoping to deaden their consciences and pacify their emotions by retreating from reality.

And though people aren't worried about Covid so much anymore, they still pull from that same ridiculous playbook for whatever they're worried about now. “You got this! You're going to rise above! You're going to summon strength from within yourself and beat this thing!” No, friend, you do *not* “got this”! In most cases, in and of yourself, you are powerless to fix what you're worried about. That's why you're anxious! There is no peace to be found within ourselves. We will find peace 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 (Eph 1:11).

Anyway, the use of these three words for prayer also implies 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 the elders,” or “We pray for our church,” and we stop right there. Well, *what* do you pray for the church? Ask for something specific. That’s what Paul’s after by repeating, “prayer,” “supplication,” “requests.” Listen: 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 (cf. Spurgeon). “Lord, I am worried about this diagnosis that I’ve just received. I want to continue to serve you in ministry. I want to see my children grow up,” or “my grandchildren grow up. But Your Word says that You ordained all the days of my life from before the foundation of the world, that nothing can harm me apart from Your sovereign will, that you work all things for my good, and that ultimately it is far better to depart this life and be with Christ in heaven. Father, help me to trust the promises of Your Word.”

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 not suggesting that we need to inform God of something He doesn’t already know. We read the passage in Matthew 6:32, where Jesus says 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?

Because when the people of God lay out all our requests before Him in prayer, we are “casting all our cares on Him,” as Peter says. And it’s in this full self-disclosure of our neediness and our helplessness that we express and articulate our complete dependence upon Him for our welfare. And at the same time, we express and articulate our 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 helpless, 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 because He delights to display His glory as Deliverer, He delights to deliver us. We magnify His provision by simply being needy and calling to Him when we discover that need,

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 one commentator said, "Prayer without thanksgiving is like a bird without wings: such a prayer cannot rise to heaven, can find no acceptance with God" (Hendriksen, 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 difficult circumstances, we can be tempted to complain to God, and to rebelliously demand Him to change them. "God, what are you doing?! Come on! It's been months! I need a job! I need to pay my bills! I'm praying to you like you command me! What are you waiting for?!" 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 our requests. Like: "God, please take care of my finances, and thank You in advance." No, not at all. This thanksgiving is actually acknowledging the absolute sovereignty of God—that even the difficult circumstances you're facing are gifts of His own Providence, circumstances in which He is in complete control.

Follow me here. If you're thanking God for everything, like it says in this text—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. You don't thank somebody for something who had no part in bringing it about. Which means: there is a rock solid, robust theology of the sovereignty of God in that little phrase, "with thanksgiving." God is not just sort of out there somewhere—*kind of* in control of everything; He's keeping an eye on certain things but not *everything* is going the way He'd like, but He's going to make sure that it's not going to go *too* crazy—no! This is not, "Well, you can count on God to *turn* this unexpected evil into good." This is the God who ordains, by the most wise and holy counsel of His will, whatsoever comes to pass. This is the God who *meant* these very circumstances for your good (Gen 50:20).

And by grounding your mind in the truth of His sovereignty, you're already on the path to peace. Why? Because this sovereign God is also the wise and loving God who is unwavering in His commitment to 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, truly: there's nothing to worry about.

John MacArthur wrote, “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!’” Martin Luther put it as helpfully as succinctly when he said, “Pray, and let God worry.”

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

And as we take heed to this **prescription** for thankful prayer—as we let our requests be made known to God with thanksgiving—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’ve 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, 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 trying circumstances, then 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 give us grace to endure, and will keep us, even in the midst of trouble. That is such a better promise than the ease and comfort that doesn’t push us closer to Christ. I’ve said it before: Grace is so much more glorious a gift than ease. And so your purpose is not to eliminate your trials. It’s not to escape

suffering at all costs. Your purpose is to trust God *in* the trials, and experience the peace that He promises in the midst of the storm.

### 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*." And 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 has no anxieties. He's not worried about anything, 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." The prophet 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 characterizes 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 doesn't 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. This 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, the kids, the bills, the rising prices, the political 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 says, "How can you be so calm with everything you've got going on?" And it's then that you shine the light of the Gospel 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

Well, let me tell you more about it. This peace is a divine peace, number one. It is a supra-rational peace. And thirdly, it is a **protective 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. 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? Why wouldn’t he say that it would guard 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 ultimately a spiritual issue.

It’s been well said that 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 *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 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, thinking that will bring them rest from their conscience. 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 begin to despair. You say to yourselves, "Oh, if only that were possible for me! If only I could lay hold of a life of peace, free from anxiety! But it can't be. I've tried. For years. But it's impossible." Yes, it *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. Jesus Himself said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

But *in* Christ, friend, it *is* possible. In union with Christ, this peace *is* attainable. And as you search your heart as you hear the Word of God preached, if you find yourself destitute of this peace this morning, perhaps it is because you are destitute of this Christ this morning. You don't get one without the other. There is no such thing as peace outside of Christ. And if as you hear God's Word you find stirring within you a sort of holy attraction to this life of peace—if you find yourself saying, "Oh, I want that! *So* badly do I want that peace!"—I call 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* that is to rule within 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 the peace *of* God before you have had peace *with* God through repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you would have the peace *of* God this day, make peace *with* God this very moment, by turning away from your sins, by abandoning all hope of commending yourself to God on the basis of your own righteousness, and by putting your trust entirely in the righteousness of Another: the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, who lived the perfect life of obedience that you were

commanded to live but failed to live, and who died the substitutionary death on the cross that you were required to die but couldn't survive, and who rose again in victory over sin and death, and freely promises eternal life and peace to all who come to Him.

What could be stopping you from laying hold of such a glorious, lovely, compassionate Savior? What could hold you back from taking hold of so great and so free a salvation? What sinful pleasures are worth forfeiting eternal life and peace for? What doubts are worth treasuring when the One fairer than the fairest of ten thousand smiles and with outstretched arms says, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*." Sinner, lay them down. Enter through the narrow gate. Come to Christ and live.

And to my brothers and sisters—those who along with me, by grace, have fled to Christ for life and peace—*this* is where true peace is to be found, even in an unknown 2026. Pursue this peace—fight for it—ever and only here, in Christ, and in worshipful, dependent, confident prayer to our Father through Him, and be anxious for nothing.