

Introduction

As I thought and prayed about this message this morning I kept thinking about Labor Day—A day to celebrate and honor the achievements of the countless men and woman who built this nation with their tireless work and labor. I find it ironic that we celebrate work by taking a day off. It is further ironic that because of the large number of potential customers, Labor Day has become an important sales weekend in the United States...so much so that the retail laborers—who should be celebrating their labor by taking a day off—are called in to work extra hours!

As I thought about labor and work I kept thinking about all the stress and anxiety that we feel. One of the things that characterizes our lives in the world today is anxiety. We are anxious about all kinds of things. We are anxious about what the future holds, anxious about our relationships, anxious about our careers or jobs. There are a thousand things that can cause anxiety in our live.

I have the privilege of working primarily with college students and young families. I believe that in this stage of life there is a unique time of concentrated anxiety and uncertainty about the future coupled with significant life-long choices that need to be made. “What am I going to do with my life?” “What should I do and where will I work?” “Who am I going to date and/or marry?” “Will we or won’t we have kids?” “What do I really believe about God?” These are just some of the questions that can bombard young adults in this chapter of their lives.

But anxiety is not limited to young adults! We all face anxiety and uncertainty about the future. We all face hurts and frustrations and disappointments.

So, how does God want us to deal with the anxiety that all this uncertainty produces? I think that part of the answer is found in the book of Philippians chapter 4. Here Paul gives us an ATTITUDE, and ACTION, and an ASSIGNMENT to deal with anxiety in our lives so that we can be filled with the Peace of God.

Phil. 4:4-9

⁴ *Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!* ⁵ *Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.*

⁶ *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.* ⁷ *Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

⁸ *And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.* ⁹ *Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.*

I. **Attitude**

- A. Paul says that our initial step in overcoming anxiety is our ATTITUDE towards life. The way that we react to uncertainty or difficulty is very important! (Verses 4 and 5) ⁴ *Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!* ⁵ *Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.*
- B. Paul's instruction to us is that we rejoice—that our lives be characterized by continuous expressions of public joy.
- C. But how can we rejoice in the face of such stress and uncertainty? The answer: We rejoice in the Lord.
 - 1. Now, this is important: We do not rejoice about our situation or our circumstances, we rejoice in the Lord! Because of what Jesus has done for us and in us, we can live a life full of joy.
 - 2. This is not a call to happiness. Paul is not instructing us to just be happy all the time. Happiness is an emotion and it is directly tied to our circumstances.
 - a. We do not overcome anxiety by pretending that it does not exist!
 - b. We do not simply say that sadness is really happiness or that distress is in fact comfort!

- c. Faith is not a gigantic game of pretend: “Pretend that everything is ok”, “Pretend that you are not afraid or worried or hurt”, “Pretend that this tragic thing is really something good in disguise!”
- 3. Paul is talking about something deeper. Not emotion, but attitude. We are instructed to have an attitude that is informed by good news of Jesus and His work to restore us into right relationship with God. Because of the love and healing work of Jesus, we can live a life that is characterized by Joy, not anxiety.
- 4. We rejoice not because of the fear and uncertainty in our lives, but rather we rejoice because we know that the Lord is near and fear and uncertainty do not get the final word!
- D. This is in fact a very common theme in the Bible: despite difficulty, the believer’s faith should bring him or her joy.
 - 1. Earlier in this same book Paul said: *“²¹ For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. ²² But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don’t know which is better. ²³ I’m torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. ²⁴ But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live..” Phil. 1:21-24*
 - a. Paul does not rejoice at the thought of dying, but He is aware that to die is to be present with Christ, and this is better by far!
 - b. Paul does not have a death-wish, but he understands that death is not the end; because of Jesus, death is a doorway into something else; something bigger and better and richer and brighter!
 - c. Paul doesn’t rejoice about dying, Paul rejoices because he understands that death is to the end! Paul rejoices in the Lord!
 - 2. In 2 Corinthians Paul says: *¹⁶ That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. 2 Cor. 4:16-18*

- a. Paul does not make light of his trouble flippantly. There is something greater that they are compared to.
 - b. Paul acknowledges that trouble is real, but in light of the eternal fulfillment that we find in God through Christ, the worries of this life are outweighed and outmatched.
 - c. Our attitude of rejoicing should shift our focus off of our very real trouble and anxiety to the things that lay beyond them and to the promises of God for our lives!
3. And in James we read: ² *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.* ³ *For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.* ⁴ *So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.* **James 1:2-4**
- a. James is not suggesting that we rejoice in the trial, he is reminding us that the trial is not the end; it does not get the last word. It is God Himself who shapes our lives so that we are brought through difficulty into maturity and wholeness.
- E. So the first step in overcoming anxiety is intentionally changing our attitude about life because we remember that God is with us and He loves us no matter what we face.

II. Action

- A. But what happens when anxiety overwhelms our attitude and rears its ugly head anyway? Paul gives us a specific ACTION that will fight against anxiety. (verses 6 & 7) ⁶ *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.* ⁷ *Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*
- B. Paul reminds us again to not be anxious, but to take our needs and fears to God. As children of God, what do we have to worry about? Isn't the God who created the Universe strong enough to care for us?
1. Here Paul echoes the teaching of Jesus in **Matthew 6:31-33** ³¹ *"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?'"* ³² *These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.* ³³ *Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*

- C. God already knows what you need. He knows better than you. He not only knows what you need, but He also knows what is best for you. He sees your future and He deeply cares for you and wants what is best for you. The cure for anxiety is to take your worries to God and trust Him to take care of you!
1. Remember that you have direct access to God, who is both all-powerful and full of love for you. A God who has entered into a covenant with you to care for you and love you.
 2. If you are a follower of Jesus, God has adopted you as His child. **Matt. 7:9-11** ⁹ *“You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? ¹⁰ Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! ¹¹ So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.*
 3. Remember that God has continually showed Himself faithful to you in the past. Our prayers and petitions are to be presented along with Thanksgiving.
- D. We are told to replace anxiety with the action of seeking God for our needs and remembering His goodness and love for us.
- E. In doing so, we invite the peace of God which exceeds anything we can understand to stand as a guard over our hearts and minds.
1. I believe that God’s peace serves as a guard in both directions; guarding form external threat that would bring us hurt or harm (it guards us from the things that would cause us anxiety) and guarding against internal anxiety that would well up inside of us (it guards us from being anxious over things that we imagine or fear).
 2. It is this mysterious peace of God that serves as a cover over our lives bringing hope and security that often defies reason or explanation.
- F. So when we are anxious, we are reminded to pray, and in doing so, we will remember both God’s greatness and His great love for us.

III. Assignment

- A. Finally, Paul gives us an ASSIGNMENT; we are to actively live our lives in consideration of the high and eternal things. (Verses 8 & 9) ⁸ *And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and*

admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.⁹ Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

- B. Paul tells us to think about, or consider, or live your life in light of the things that are:
1. True—like God and His love and His Character and His Nature. Live in light of the truth of your place in God’s eternal Kingdom.
 2. Things that are Honorable—like Love for others and self-sacrifice and selflessness
 3. Things that are Right—like Justice and honoring God and Personal Holiness.
 4. Things that are Pure—like righteous living that honors God and the purity of our own lives because we are now made whole in Christ.
 5. Things that are Lovely—like the natural world and community and the way that we can represent Jesus to the world.
 6. Things that are Admirable—like self-sacrifice and love and faithfulness.
 7. Things that are Excellent—the highest and most virtuous things. Things like faith, hope, and Love.
 8. Things that are Worthy of Praise—like Jesus and God and The Holy Spirit, and the pure and Holy Love that seems to bind God together within Himself and with us.
- C. We add to this the directive to put in practice what we have heard from and seen in the lives of other faithful believers and we have a recipe for fostering the peace of God in our lives.
- D. It is when we fix our attention and point our lives towards these kinds of things that we gradually move deeper and deeper into the presence of God and are surrounded and ruled by His peace. It is this process of discipleship and knowing God that banishes anxiety from our lives more than anything else.
- E. And this is the promise of God through His servant Paul: “And the peace of God will be with you.”

Conclusion

So, how do we live in the face of all the uncertainty and fear that life brings? We allow the peace of God to rule in our lives!

- By fostering an attitude of rejoicing because we remember that God is with us and He deeply loves us;
- by replacing anxiety with the action of seeking God for our needs and remembering His goodness and love for us;
- by taking serious our assignment to actively live our lives in consideration of the high and eternal things we position ourselves to be covered and infused with God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand.

PRAY