

Overwhelming Peace

Philippians 4:5b-9

Two weeks ago, Miles sent me a text message asking if I wanted to preach today. With everything going on with the coronavirus, Alex had to get back to work earlier than expected and was unable to preach. I said sure, which gave me two weeks to prepare.

I say that, because I want to take a moment to talk about the process behind this sermon before we dive into the text this morning. You see, when given the opportunity to preach, I like to dive deep. I like to break down the passage, look at the original languages, do word studies, chase rabbit trails, and so many other things. When I came to the passage we'll be looking at today, I used that familiar approach. But, for some reason, it wasn't working. I felt like I was slogging my way through a swamp and wasn't making any progress. I tried for an entire week and got nowhere. I got no further than some surface level notes about the passage.

That's when I felt God leading me in a different direction. The passage says what it says and there is no reason to overthink it. My normal methods of study weren't needed. Instead of studying the text, he wanted me to experience it and live with it. So, living with the text meant spending 17 hours behind the wheel and two days in a hotel with crying kids and a stressed out wife; then, coming back home to commemorate the second anniversary of the life & death of my daughter, Harmony. All of this, while trying to prepare a sermon. A bit much, if you ask me, but that's what God had me do. He wanted me to experience a full plate for this sermon.

Why do I say all of this? Because that is how I want us to approach the text this morning.

This text is not an academic study that we can listen to and file away as head knowledge. No, it is one that we need to experience and live out each and every day of our lives, much like I was forced to this past week. I truly believe, as a church, that if we can do that, we will all have a richer intimacy with the Lord and be better equipped to face the world in which we live.

So, let's pray and then turn to our text for this morning.

Pray

Philippians 4:5b-9

Philippians 4:5-9 (ESV)

5b The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, 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 your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Overview

Before we dive into the specifics of our passage, I want to give you an overview of where we're going this morning. In these verses Paul gives us 4 commands: 1 negative, and 3 positive. They are as follows:

1. Don't worry
2. Talk to God
3. Think good thoughts
4. Practice these things

We're going to spend the majority of our time looking at these commands, but there is an overarching theme to this entire passage that cannot be ignored. It is this: **we have access to the peace of God, and the God who gives us this peace is with those who live according to the truths of this passage.** It is this peace that permeates each of the commands.

And this is also a text I want to take great care with this morning. Mental health and anxiety are real issues that I do not want to take lightly. Many would present this text as the "cure for anxiety" but I don't want to say that. Instead, I want us all to be encouraged by the Prince of Peace as he offers us a means to find comfort in him in the midst of life's anxious moments.

The Lord is at Hand

When Alex preached last week, I wanted to see whether he would speak about the latter half of verse 5. Much to my delight, and through the Lord's sovereignty, he did not speak about this portion of the verse. Why my delight? Because **these five words are vital to understanding the passage we have before us this morning.** Let me again read those words:

The Lord is at hand

What does it mean that the Lord is at hand? A study of this phrase quickly becomes quite academic, and if you look at any number of commentaries on the passage, you will find varying answers. Some say it's about the Lord's future return being near. Others say this is about the present state of the kingdom and how we are living in it. While plausible, I don't think any of those fit the context. We're about to study a text that talks about being anxious and approaching God in prayer. So, with that, I appreciate the *Christian Standard Bible's* translation of this verse:

The Lord is near

In other words, God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit is close to us. While it's comforting to know that Jesus is returning, it's even more comforting to know that he's with us. He is near to us and that is never *not* the case. When Proverbs tells us that there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother, the Godhead is that friend.

Now, we know about God's omnipresence and that he is everywhere at all times. But that's too textbook. Let's make this more relatable. Theoretically **we know God's nearness to be true; but do you experience and feel it?** When I talk about the nearness of God, I'm talking like he's as close as the person sitting right next to you this morning. Wherever we go, God is always that close to us. In a crowded room, he's standing shoulder to shoulder with you. When you feel alone and no one else is around, God is right there. God is near like that toddler who annoyingly won't leave you alone and keeps saying, "Mommy," over and over again. That's the nearness of God I'm talking about.

Have you felt God be that close to you? I hope so, because he is, whether you feel it or not.

It's important that we understand this, because **this truth is the foundation upon which the rest of this passage is built.** It is **only** because the Lord is near that we can do all the things commanded in the following verses. When we realize how close God is to us, it will change how we approach him, which is exactly what Paul wants for us.

So, let's look at the first command.

Don't Worry

Because the Lord is near, the first thing Paul commands in verse 6 is:

do not be anxious about anything

It sounds simple enough, right? Don't worry about anything. Like the song says, "Don't worry, be happy." We all know it's not that simple. Think about your typical day. What are the things that cross your mind that cause you to be anxious? Will I have enough money to pay all my bills this month? Did I lock the front door when I left the house this morning? Will my kids grow up to be successful? Will they even listen to me today? What's for dinner? You get the idea. Big or small, we worry about a lot of things. Not to mention outside things we worry about like: when will all this COVID-19 madness end, or who's going to be in the White House after this election? I don't want to dismiss any of these; because, on some level, they are all legitimate concerns.

But, Paul tells us, **no matter our worries, we don't need to worry about them.** And Paul is only echoing the words that we find Jesus speaking in Matthew's gospel when he says,

Matthew 6:25-34 (ESV)

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 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? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

I love Jesus' jab at the end. He's like, "I mean, if you're gonna worry, at least worry about today's troubles. That's enough to deal with."

So, if the directive is don't worry or be anxious about anything, I think we should take a moment to define our terms because there are different types of worry & anxiety. The first

type is the kind that's pretty easy to deal with: those items that cross your mind and you're like, "oh, I should give so-and-so a call, or I need to remember to take out the trash." There is some level of anxiety that these things need to or should get done, but if we forget to do them it's not the end of the world for most people. I don't think Paul is talking about those kinds of worries.

Paul is more concerned with the type of anxiety or worry that causes our heart to

race or sends our mind in a spiral. You know, those things where we think about something that *could* happen and then we let our mind play out all the worst case scenarios that, in all reality, probably won't happen. What if I marry the wrong person? What if I lose my job? What if, what if, what if... Then there are also those legitimate concerns, much like Jesus spoke of like having your basic necessities covered. These are the kinds of things we worry about.

And Paul tells us: those things we worry about, don't worry about them. Don't worry about *any* of it.

There's a reason why we shouldn't worry, which leads us to Paul's second command:

Talk to God

The second half of verse 6:

but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

In other words, **it's okay to have those worries and concerns.** Those worries come as a natural part of living in this fallen world. But, we don't have to keep them bottled up inside and let them fester in our minds, which is what most of us do. When we do that the end result is usually more worry and anxiety than we originally started with because things start to compound and become bigger than what they really are. Instead of letting that happen, Paul tells us to take those cares to God. Get it off your chest and let him handle it.

Now, this is not a license to be lazy and to think that the Lord will magically handle all our affairs. We still have to do the things we are responsible for. What Paul is saying is we need to let God handle the things that he should handle.

With that said, let's unpack this.

I love the contrast in absolutes that Paul uses. On the one hand we are to be anxious about nothing, nada, zilch. That's a big fat zero on the board for worry. On the other hand, when it comes to what we should take to God in prayer, the answer is the complete opposite. **We are to take everything to him in prayer.** There is no cap or limit to what we can and should talk to God about. So, all those worries, you now know where they should go.

Now, one thing that stands out about this verse is the three ways Paul describes what we are to take to God: **1) prayers, 2) supplications, and 3) requests.** Yes, they are all prayer, but each has its own nuances. **The general command is this: take your requests to God.** If you have something you need, God is your go to man. Talk to God and let him know about it.

Paul defines what we take to God by breaking them down into prayers & supplications. The way I like to look at it is this: **prayer is those general things I take to God.** If I'm honest, they are probably things I don't care about one way or another, but I do have a preference. For example, all of my family is back east in North Carolina & Virginia. I would love to move back there one day & I pray about it often. I take that prayer to God. But, I'm not going to lose sleep at night if God's answer is to keep me in Spokane. **These are the kinds of prayers I pray all the time** and the kind that make me think of Paul's words in his first letter to the Thessalonians in chapter 5 verse 17: **pray without ceasing.**

Supplications are those next level prayers. These are the prayers you are praying with some urgency where you *really* need God to move in your life because you don't see any other way unless he comes through for you. These are the kind of prayers we pray when there's more month than there is money or when family & friends are battling a serious illness. **In such moments we are crying out to the Lord and pleading with him, begging for his mercy. It's a Joseph, "please don't let my brothers kill me" or Jesus in the garden "is there another way?" type of prayer, if you know what I mean.** The Psalms are full of these kinds of prayers, especially from David. Jot these two psalms down and read them later: **Psalms 55 & 62.**

No matter the worry we are facing, God is near, asking us to bring those items to him in prayer. I like the way Tony Evans speaks about this passage in his study Bible:

Every time we begin to worry, we should see that as a call from God telling us that it's time to pray. Prayer is relational communication with God. It seeks to draw resources from the invisible spiritual realm into visible, physical reality. The sobering truth is that the more you worry, the less you pray. But the more you pray, the less you worry.

When you make a petition, be specific. A moment in which you are plagued by worry is not the time for one of those general prayers for God to bless the world. To deal with anxiety, make sure your petitions are precise. Get real with God.

Tony Evans Study Bible

And we are to do all of this with a heart of thanksgiving. Dr. Evans continues:

Prayer can often feel frustrating—like when you go to a soda machine, put in your money, punch the button, and nothing comes out. But thinking of it in those terms causes us to miss how prayer works. God wants us to make requests with thanksgiving. **Give thanks, not for the problem itself, but for the God you are inviting into your specific problem.** Offering thanks is a demonstration of faith in God's goodness and provision despite what you see.

Why be thankful? Because God is near. God is open to hearing your problems. He wants you to come to him with your problems. He is able to handle your problems. And, as Peter says in **1 Peter 5:7**, **we can cast all our cares on God because he cares for us.**

The Overwhelming Peace of God

When we take all our cares to God in this manner, Paul says something incredible happens:

Philippians 4:7

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

A supernatural peace from God comes into your life that is beyond all comprehension. This is calm in the midst of all the chaos that is causing your worry or anxiety. In a situation where everything is going wrong, most people's stress and anxiety would be through the roof. But, for the person who takes their cares to God, they can experience this peace. This is the kind of peace Job experienced when God allowed everything to hit the fan in his life. Instead of cursing God or thinking negatively, he worshipped and rebuked any negative talk about God. When it would have been easy to sin or be angry, he trusted God. That's peace that surpasses all understanding.

In a lot of ways, this peace is hard to explain and I dare say it's one of those things you have to experience to really understand it. For me, it was two years ago this month that I experienced just how powerful God's peace can be. It's one of those things I've thought about a lot in preparation for this sermon; because, as I stated earlier, this was one

of the many things on my full plate this week. So, **let me explain this overwhelming peace by sharing my own experience with it.**

My wife was a little more than 6 months pregnant with our daughter, Harmony, and she had stopped moving as much. After a weekend in the hospital, Harmony's heart rate was low and the doctor's left us with a decision: do an emergency c-section or hope for things to improve. We prayed. Before we could make a decision, doctors were rushing in to prepare Jaimie for that emergency c-section because Harmony's heart rate had dropped even more. We were told that our daughter might not survive the delivery. By the grace of God, she made it through the delivery, but was immediately rushed up to the NICU. Meanwhile, while doctors worked to keep our daughter alive, Jaimie was losing blood and fighting for her own life. She was rushed away for an emergency surgery to stop the bleeding.

In that moment, all I could do was pray. Everything was out of my control. My only option was to cry out to God while both my wife and daughter fought for life. I remember our brother, Alex Blackburn, meeting me in the waiting room while Jaimie was in surgery and remarking how calm I was given everything that was happening. **That peace wasn't my own. It was God's peace in that moment.** It kept my mind clear and my heart at ease. It allowed me to talk calmly to the doctors & understand all that was going on. It gave me the clarity to make the hard choices without my heart swaying me. Did I worry? Yes, I was afraid I'd lose my wife & daughter in the same day. But, I still knew that whatever happened, God was in control. And it was that same peace that gave me the strength to hold my daughter as she took her final breath, and to grieve with my wife as she battled to recover without the child she'd carried for months.

I could say more about this peace, but I won't belabor the point. **This is peace that the world doesn't know. Only God can give it, and it carries you through the most difficult circumstances.** And why? Because you put your worries in his hands, instead of carrying them yourself. And **you have peace, not because your prayer was answered, but simply because you know God has heard your prayer and is keeping you.**

Think Good Thoughts

Another thing that can be of great help when dealing with worry and anxiety is to shift your thinking. This is exactly what Paul encourages us to do with his third command. Verse 8:

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure,

whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

So, instead of focusing on the things that are causing us to worry, Paul teaches that we are to redirect our thoughts and allow ourselves to think on these things. He gives us a list of 8 things we should give our mental energy to.

Why think about these things? Well, [Proverbs 23:7](#) tells us that **as we think in our heart, so we are. If that's true, then we are ultimately the product of the things that we consume and think about.** I mean, think about it for a minute. What do you spend the majority of your day reading, listening to, or watching? Do you end up thinking about these things? I know I do. It's one of the reasons why I don't regularly watch or read the news. I filter what I consume on social media, which is much more difficult during an election year. And so many other little things I do to control what passes my eyes and ears. Instead, I am intentional about my intake of the good.

Now, one of the things we should appreciate about Paul's list is that there are a lot of "whatevers" in here. This means **we are given the freedom to think about anything that fits into these categories.** Is it honorable or just? Yes? Then you're free to think about it. Is it pure or lovely? Give your attention to those things. But, I will put a disclaimer on this because there are plenty of things that might fit into one of these categories, but it's still not beneficial to think about. Like, a lot of the stories we hear or read about in the news are true, but that doesn't mean it's something that will lift us up.

While Paul's list is wide open, I want to make it easy for you. Let me point you to the One who fits all these categories: Jesus Christ. Jesus is the truth. He is honorable. His judgments are just. He is pure and sinless. He is love personified. There's no one I'd recommend above him. He is the epitome of excellence. And he is the only one worthy of the highest praise. Think about his character. Think about him. Meditate on Christ. He will elevate your mood and take your mind off its worries.

Practice These Things

Finally, as Paul wraps up his letter, he gives one final command, which we find in verse 9:

[Philippians 4:9](#)

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things

The command? **Practice these things.** What things?

Paul has spent time with the saints in Philippi. He lived among them, taught them, and showed them how to live a godly life. They received these things from him. And, now, he has continued to encourage them in this manner through his letter. They have a wealth of knowledge on how to live the Christian life, **all they have to do is put it into practice.**

And this isn't the only time he's encouraged this. As a matter of fact, this is the third time he's encouraged these believers to follow him. In **chapter 2 verses 17 & 18** Paul encourages the believers to rejoice with him because of their faith and the labor he has put into his apostolic work. Then, in **chapter 3 verse 17** he encourages them to imitate him and keep their eyes fixed on those who walk in like manner.

Paul is saying: you've heard me teach, you've seen me live this out, go and do the same.

The same is true for us. We have heard the Word of God taught. We have been shown how to live the Christian life. This morning we have learned how to cast our cares on the Lord so we can experience his peace. But, **the burden is on us to practice these things.**

Conclusion

And here's the kicker, when we practice these things, Paul leaves us with the most beautiful promise:

Philippians 4:9b

and the God of peace will be with you.

The God who promises to guard our hearts and minds with his overwhelming supernatural peace when we give him our cares, this God of peace promises to be with us.

As we close, let's go back to the whirlwind of a week I had leading up to this sermon. The only way I made it through the week was by experiencing and living this passage. It was not an academic study, **it was real life.** In those moments of stress and anxiety, I gave those cares to the Lord and he returned those prayers with his peace. **I experienced the nearness of God.** Did I do it perfectly? Absolutely not, as my family will kindly attest. But, in the moments I did, I was at peace.

The Lord is at hand. Yes, he is soon to return and judge the world and make all things new.

This is true. But, the Lord is near. He is near to the believer each and every day. **More than anything, the God of peace is our peace.** He is the one who eases our anxieties and worries.

The Lord is near. Let us turn to him and his son, Jesus Christ, so we can experience his overwhelming peace.

Let's pray.