

## BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING

Warwick Central Baptist Church  
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**Bible: Philippians 4: 4-7: (Reading from the New King James)**

**"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord IS at hand. 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."**

**Philippians 4: 12-13 (NIV): "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."**

**Be! Anxious! For! Nothing! This is a command, not a suggestion. St. Paul told the Philippian people that God was with them, to rejoice in God's presence, to reflect His love through their gentleness, and above all to BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING. These words are certainly relevant to us today, as we now share a worldwide reason to be anxious, the silent COVID enemy.**

**Max Lucado wrote a book called Anxious for Nothing: Finding Calm in a Chaotic World. It was published in 2017, way before COVID 19 entered our lives,**

and while the world was pretty stable. In it he talks about definitions of the word anxious. He says it describes a sense of perpetual unease, an underlying feeling. Lucado aligns it with angst, which is “a feeling of deep anxiety or dread, generally an unfocused one, about the human condition or the state of the world in general.” We’re all familiar with the term “low grade fever”. We can think about anxiety as a low-grade fear, one that is always with us, always at the base of our thoughts and actions. I’ve seen this low-grade fear in friends, and I sometimes sense it in myself.

In fact, as I quote this Scripture, I am always humbled by the thought that I sometimes don’t do well with this anxiety thing. I try to double down on this message as it speaks to me. I pray that I will be confident in the Lord as fall changes to winter, and we don’t know how health issues or quarantine guidelines will impact our lives. Somehow it feels as if the evil COVID virus is waiting to pounce when we least expect it.

In his 2017 book, Lucado says that as we age, it can be harder for us to let go of anxiety. And as we age, we do have more actual things to fear. Our life experiences have told us that a lot of bad things can happen; we probably have more health issues; and as we get older, we just worry more.

There are the parenting worries—we worry about our children and our families, and now some of us also have grandchildren to worry about. There are a lot of “what-ifs”—what could happen, what could go wrong. Sometimes the negative voices just play in our heads, and once started, it’s a loop, the negative voices don’t let go—there’s that sense of perpetual unease. When

that happens, we sometimes feel guilty thinking that our faith isn't strong enough.

Well that was all in place before COVID-19 hit. Now we actually do have something real to worry about, and a whole lot of unknowns. Life as we knew it has flipped into a world of masks, social distancing, sheltering at home, unemployment, empty streets, or streets full of demonstrators, riots, and closed businesses. Every day for several months our governor and our president along with various health experts were on TV with live reports about the state of our country and our world. And now as cold weather approaches, we get a variety of reports about how the virus may change and spread again.

Sadly, in reality we know that the anxiety will come, the anxiety of being in the middle of a pandemic, the anxiety of uncertainty, the anxiety about the future—will COVID come back? Will it come to our house? So we go back to Lucado's book. He tells us that we can make a decision about our anxiety. We can change our beliefs. Instead of living in perpetual anxiety, we can believe that God is in control of our lives. We can go back to that Philippians letter and "let our requests be made known to God, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving". We know that God answers prayer in His wisdom. The answers can be "yes", "no", or "not now", but He hears and He answers. He is in control of our lives, our world. He is even in control in the midst of a pandemic.

I read of a Harvard study that taught participants to rethink their stress response as helpful, as their bodies helping them rise to a challenge. When they were able to think that way, their bodies experienced physical changes

like what happens in moments of joy and courage. So the author said that when you think of stress as your friend, your body believes you and your stress response becomes healthier. I'm still working on that one—though my mind believes, my body still resists sometimes.

And I do wonder how St. Paul would have reassured the Philippians in our current COVID scenario?

I think that St. Paul would tell us the same thing that he told the Philippians 2000 years ago. After all, this is Paul who encountered dangers throughout his life and his journeys—shipwreck, bite by a poisonous snake, more than once being flogged near to death. This is Paul who was writing from prison, chained in the dampness and filth, awaiting death, possibly to be torn apart by hungry lions or be beheaded, which was his actual fate.

As he awaited death, in this same letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:12-13)

Paul found his contentment because God's unsurpassing peace was guarding his heart and mind. So let's talk more about that peace, a peace that is way beyond our capacity to really understand.

Think of an experience or a scene that brings a tremendous sense of peace to your soul. I recently was in a chapel service where the pastor guided us in a

visioning exercise. He told us to get comfortable, close our eyes, and think about where we would go to meet Jesus. How would He enter? Would you reach out and touch Him, or would He touch you? What would His eyes say to you? Would He speak? What would He say? Powerful!

As I reflect on that experience, I can still feel the peace that I felt then. So I say to you, think of an experience that brings you a deep sense of peace.

Would it be Peace in Nature—

- Seashore, garden, sunset?

Would it be Peace in Music—

- symphony, chorus, a choir filling your senses with beautiful sound, or maybe yourself singing praise to the Lord?

Maybe it would be Peace in feelings—a feeling of all encompassing love—

- Birth of a baby or the overwhelming love of a parent for a sleeping child.
- Thinking about peace in feelings, would you think about God's love?—How He knows you, loves you despite your shortcomings, loves you more fully and completely than any human being can, holds you in His hand.

Think of how you can "Rejoice in the Lord" as our Scripture says. Take a moment now to think about your own private experiences of peace—where you find serenity amid the storms. Now take your symbol and multiply it by a million—that is God's peace that surpasses understanding.

Poem: "Growing in Christ Jesus" (Rev. G. A. Studdert-Kennedy): "Peace does not mean the end of all our striving; Joy does not mean the drying of our tears. Peace is the power that comes to souls arriving up to the light where God himself appears." "...the power that comes to souls arriving up to the light where God himself appears"

And what else do we know about God's peace?—our Scripture said that this "Peace will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus"

- Some of us can still remember early TV ads—Colgate toothpaste ads? Colgate toothpaste had Gardol, which put a protective shield around your teeth. In the ads, Wicked Mr. Tooth Decay was dressed all in black with a weird hat, and he would run at that invisible Gardol shield and just bounce right off.
- Now we could think of "Evil Mr. Soul Decay" trying to get inside our guard/our shield
- For people in a later generation, you might think of the "Bubble Boy" movie about a boy who was born without an immune system, had to live in a protective bubble.

Fix that image in your mind. Think of God's unsurpassing peace as a clear invisible shield around each one of us. And one way to remind ourselves of that protective shield of His peace might be the face shields and masks that are required these days. Every time you see a person with a mask or a face shield, or every time you put one on yourself, think about these tools as a reminder to guard God's unsurpassing peace inside you and around each one of us who believe in Him.

Peace around us where? On the rock of Jesus Christ, of course. Jesus said: "a wise man built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock."

So we can picture ourselves standing on a rock with Jesus' shield all around us protecting us, and our faith sustaining us. There is no room in that picture for perpetual anxiety, no room for underlying fear or guilt, no room for worry about how the sky is falling. We are standing firm in our faith, standing on God's promises.

I urge you—

First, Call on God to overcome the stress of your fears and worries, call on Him to help you let your thoughts work for you, and rejoice in Him always

Second, recall your thoughts and images about that place of God's unsurpassing peace inside you.

Third, As you put on your mask or see another person with a mask or a shield, be confident in the certainty that Christ Jesus will guard that peace inside of you. Be anxious for nothing.

With all that in mind, we truly CAN stand on our rock surrounded by the shield of the peace of Jesus Christ and declare that we are "Standing on the Promises of Christ our King." Amen

