

Worry or Peace Philippians 4:6,7

Our Scripture portion in the New King James reads: "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 passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

In the Message: "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life."

There are different kinds of anxiety. Much of our anxiety is circumstantial. You might have travel anxiety like I do when I go to the airport. People sometimes are nervous or anxious when driving on the freeway. You might feel anxious at the doctor's office, or at the DMV or even at the bank. We have talked with people who have lived overseas for awhile and they said that part of their experience of culture shock (when returning to the U.S.) was experienced when facing all of the choices we make when shopping. It took some time for shopping to become a comfortable rather than an anxious experience for them.

Situational anxiety can take what would otherwise be rich and enjoyable experiences and ruin them for us. I remember when this happened to my Dad. He was always a great 49er fan. In the old days the "name" 49er fans were known by was "the 49er faithful." This, in contrast to terms like "Raider nation," etc. They were called "the 49er faithful" because the team never won. But then Bill Walsh became the 49ers coach and Joe Montana became their quarterback and they were better than they had ever been before and they went up against their nemesis, the Dallas Cowboys, in the NFC championship game. Dwight Clark, the 49er's tight end made "the

catch" for a touchdown at the end of the game and the 49ers won. But my Dad, who had watched and listened to 49er games for decades did not share in the moment of victory. He was too anxious to watch. Too often, anxiety will do to us what it did to my Dad, it will take from our lives instead of adding to our lives.

Another kind of anxiety might be more closely identified with who we are as persons. Worry or anxiety may be the way that we have learned to engage in life or to participate in the lives of the people we care about. This is a means for us of relating to others who are in our lives. We demonstrate the sincerity of our love by means of worry. But this becomes uncomfortable and distressing. It is not a positive way to relate.

Anxiety might also be evidenced by an absence of confidence or assurance. An example of this is the common fear that many have of public speaking. I have found that if I replace concern about what others might think of me with a passion to communicate an important message then nervousness is replaced by a focus on what I am doing and saying. Though I do not feel anxious when preaching my body gives away the fact that the experience is still stressful for me as I often will have a "nervous" stomach on Sunday afternoons.

Anxiety is what we call a negative emotion. Negative emotions build the level of stress in our lives. Many studies of disease show that stress is a causal factor. The more stress that you have in your life the more likely that you will routinely get sick or even suffer from a serious illness.

Whatever the cause, the Bible offers to us a remedy for anxiety and worry. We are to replace anxiety and worry with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving as we make our requests known to God. Prayer is asking and supplication is asking on behalf of others. So, whether it is our own needs or those of others, we are to add to them the medicine of thanksgiving as we bring them to the Lord. This takes our problems seriously. We are not

helped by those who say of our problems, don't worry about it, it's not a big deal. If you try to diminish the size or importance of my problem then I am unaffected because I know just how big and important my problem is. So, turn your worry's into prayer and supplication that you bring into the presence of God. You are important to Him and so are all of your problems. He wants to hear all about them.

But then there is the medicine of thanksgiving. This seems at first to be counter-intuitive. Why give thanks for what is not welcome? The answer is spiritual. It is an answer of faith. Our faith holds that God is in control of our lives. He knows better than we do, all of the time. He instructs us, "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Giving thanks for the unwelcome is a way for us to accept each and every circumstance as the present will of God. We know that God looks at our lives differently than we do. His priorities are out of order compared to our own. But this demonstrates our need to adjust, not that He is out of touch. Remember the paralytic, carried to Jesus by his friends who broke through the roof to lower him before Jesus' feet. His friends brought him for healing. He came with excitement and anticipation for Jesus' words, "Rise up and walk!" So, they lowered him down and Jesus looked down at him and said, "Son, I forgive you." Everyone was shocked. But feel the man's initial disappointment... but then Jesus did heal him, He just took care of what was most important first. When you thank God for the unwelcome, can you think of it that way? That is, that God is just taking care of what is most important first?

Thanking God for your needs expresses trust in God. It shows confidence and assurance. The thankful spirit knows that God is good and that He will be good to me. Thanking God remembers that He is in control. My world has not been taken over by chaos. Random and chance effects are not to blame. God is working as He always does.

Thanking God for the very sources of your anxiety is a way to defeat the devil. It is a way of escape from the temptation of 1 Cor. 10:13. For the thankful spirit never sinks into the self-pities of deprivation. Gratefulness knows that God is and that His blessings are too many to count and always more than we deserve.

So, what is the opposite of worry and anxiety? Joy? Happiness? Thanksgiving? Gratefulness? Peace? Let me offer another word, Euphoria! To have a euphoric experience is to be sated with an overall sense of well being so that what you feel is just wonder. Listen to Paul's words, "And the peace of God which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

A post final high, a basketball team in a championship game that executed everything I taught them, coming to the end of and release from a gall bladder attack, a spiritual insight through Scripture that brings the consciousness that God has spoken to me, bringing your anxieties to God with a thankful spirit and knowing that everything is going to be all right.

So much of the euphoric is rare and unusual. We only pass that way a few times. But the euphoric experience of the peace of God that passes all understanding? We are invited by Paul to pitch our tents there and stay awhile. The peace of God that passes understanding? That's my new address!