

Philippians 4:6-8

“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.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

On February 28, 2020, New Zealand reported its first COVID-19 case. On March 14, 2020, the government announced that anyone entering New Zealand must self-isolate for 14 days, with the exception of those arriving from the Pacific. Then, on March 19, 2020, all indoor gatherings of more than 100 people were cancelled, and borders were closed to all but New Zealand citizens and permanent residents. On March 25, 2020, at 11:59 pm, New Zealand moved to Alert Level 4, and the entire nation went into self-isolation. A State of National Emergency was declared at 12:21 pm. As the world was grappling with the pandemic, on February 24, 2022, a war between Russia and Ukraine broke out. Millions of people were displaced from their homes, and hundreds of thousands, if not millions, lost their lives, and others lost their beloved ones. More recently, the Palestinian militant group Hamas launched an unprecedented assault on Israel on 7 October, with hundreds of gunmen infiltrating communities near the Gaza Strip; now Israel and Gaza are at full-fledged war against each other. Thousands of innocents are being killed on both sides each day. How can I not be anxious? Things around me are going crazy, so now, how can I be joyful?

Or again, how am I supposed to rejoice in the Lord when the memory of past sins weighs so heavily on my heart? How can I obey this command when people I love are being persecuted and are suffering unjustly? I just lost my job. My mother died last week. My children won't even talk to me. The car won't start, and I don't have the money to get it fixed. I'm supposed to see the doctor next week, but I'm too scared of what he'll say. How can I not be anxious? But remember, Paul wrote those words while in prison. He wrote those words, not knowing if he might be beheaded for nothing more than declaring his

allegiance to Jesus Christ. The man who wrote those words knew more about suffering and deprivation than all of us combined. Yet he exhorts us not to be anxious about anything.

Recently, I read somewhere that the royals of England practice stoicism, especially Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip. What the stoics taught was the reason for anxiety is our attachment to things. Stoics believed that most people are not able to live a contented life because they love the wrong things. So they believed and taught not to love success because if you set your heart on success, you will be anxious about losing it. You shouldn't set your heart on the family because even if you get a good family, you will always be worried about it. And if something goes wrong with the family, you will be devastated. So philosophers were saying don't love the things you aren't in control of and don't give your heart to anything but to your own virtue. Be a courageous man, a man of integrity, and so on. Nevertheless, it is a dangerous way of living because it asks you to look into yourself for solutions.

But here, Paul talks about peace in challenges, and chaos is not the absence of fear. Neither it's about being able to control our emotions. It is not inaction or passivity. It is not apathy. Paul does not tell us to ignore or deny the problem. It is not withdrawal. In moments of anxiety, the easiest thing to do is retreat into a corner of safety and complain and grow bitter. But in verse 6, Paul asks us to pray in everything. There are two experiential realities in which a Christian might live: anxiety or peace/worry or rest/consternation or contentment. Here, Paul contrasts these two and tells us that the way to move from one into the other is by prayer; the alternative to anxiety or worry is the pouring out of one's heart to God in prayer with thanksgiving.

Then in verse 7, scripture says the supernatural peace of God will guard your heart. It is a peace which surpasses all understanding. Meaning we can't explain it. We can't discover it, or create it, or bottle it. We can't buy it or sell it. We can't earn it or give it away. We can only receive it. And we can only receive it from God. When we fervently and honestly and passionately pour out our requests to God, something of the very nature of God himself, his inner peace, what he himself as God experiences, comes into us and takes up residence and

governs our hearts and overcomes and replaces our anxious thoughts and enables us to experience the depths of that spiritual serenity that God himself feels and enjoys.

Now, in verse 8, Paul exhorts us to meditate on the things that are true, noble, pure and lovely. He is not asking us to think but rather asking us to meditate. Today's worldview is such that think nothing, meditate nothing and come to a place of emptiness. Then, you will find the beauty of life. But here, Paul is talking about the scripture, Gospel and doctrine. Only the Gospel is noble and pure. God's love towards us is noble; his death on the cross is pure. His grace towards us is lovely. Mediate on those things. So when you meditate on the goodness of God/gospel, you will be filled with his Joy and peace. Your hearts will overflow with the hope of future and eternity. Meditate His word, thank God for his love and trust His wisdom because you know God is sovereign and He loves you. God can turn around any situation and use anybody or anything to help you. So, trust Him. Meditating His word, His attributes, and His goodness will help us to place our trust in Him even in our challenges.

When you get up every morning, tell God in your prayer, "Lord, I trust you. In the midst of all my insecurities, doubts, fluctuating feelings and fear, I place my trust in you. Lord, you are sovereign, you are Alpha and Omega, you are the author and finisher of my salvation, and I surrender everything at your feet. And I trust you, Oh Lord."

Paul is exhorting us to keep our eyes on Jesus. If you have invested your trust in Christ as your treasure and your only hope for the forgiveness of sins, then surely you can live in peace because he holds your future. There is a sense in which Paul is declaring: "Jesus is our joy," and He is ours, and we are His regardless of whether the sky is clear and sunny or threatens us with an approaching funnel cloud. That is why we can rejoice "always," at all times, in every circumstance, no matter the pain or pleasure. Our Joy is constant not because of our circumstances are but because Jesus is.