

Founded on Peace
Phil. 4:6-7

Good morning! We're on the eighth part of our 10-part series I'm calling "Real Life Foundations". Today, our topic will address one of the burning issues of our day. I'm talking about the time when there was this hearing in the senate, and in this hearing, they brought in social media CEOs, and some parents, too, who had lost their children in many ways connected to social media, like a child that had died by suicide, another one that had been bullied, another one that had died from drugs that they had gotten.

And I'm watching this whole scene, these clips of parents in front of Senate with these CEOs. It was a very morbid scene. And my heart was going out to these parents as I'm watching them with pictures of kids. And immediately as I'm watching this and my heart is being filled with compassion, I immediately go to my kids, and I start thinking about the world that my children are growing up in, which is very different than the world I grew up in the 1960s. For sure, there were a lot of challenges I faced, maybe on a smaller scale or some similar challenges, but for students now, and for those of you who are students who are listening to me, there's so much that's coming at you.

You see, we live in a world where you can watch your friends have parties and they're all seemingly enjoying themselves, and you feel internally your own angst and frustration. And there's a value system where the world is so often now discipling our children because so much of their lives are spent on a screen. And this is not just for kids that this is happening, it's also adults that it has resulted in the growth of anxiety in our world.

You can look back over the last 60 years and you can see some trends. You can go back to the 1960s, and see the sexual revolution, how that began to change

the amount of anxiety and depression in our culture. There were other inflection points from 2008 when people started having phones in front of them. And then again in 2020, there's another inflection point where it seems that anxiety and depression continues to rise, continues to grow in our culture. And in reality, this anxiety has been there for a long time, but it's becoming more and more prevalent lately. It's more widespread to so that anxiety is the biggest mental health crisis of our day.

And maybe, you can relate. Maybe today you feel a tremendous amount of anxiety. That anxiety could be connected to circumstances, but it could be something in your life that has just been weighing on you for years and you still carry that anxiety. And today, as we're looking at this subject, it is a crisis in our culture that nobody has been able to solve. People are looking for solutions. Medicine, therapy, and all of that can help. But there's still this crisis that we're trying to figure out, and there's this seemingly unanswered question of, “How do we get peace in our culture? How do we get peace in our homes? How do we get peace in our hearts?”

That's why I'm trying to put the emphasis on God's Word this year. I want us to truly be aware and convinced that the solution that we're looking for is found in the ways of God, that as our culture drifts further and further away from God's design and his principles and his precepts, that for those of us who are looking for truth and looking for answers, that this is the starting point. This is the most important place that we can go to get answers for our life, especially around the subject of peace. Today, my message is entitled, “**Founded on Peace**”.

So, as we continue to study the Word of God, there's a word that comes up 46 times in the letters of Paul to the early Christians. You see, peace is a central theme in his letters. He talks about the kind of peace that only God can give to our

lives. And today what I want to do is I want to look at a passage of scripture where Paul emphasizes the pathway to God's peace in Philippians 4:6.

It's interesting to know that Paul writes the book of Philippians to the church at Philippi, from a prison cell. He was alone in that Roman prison cell, not knowing when his life is going to be over, not knowing if he might be killed or murdered for his faith in Jesus. Paul is a guy who's been beaten across the back multiple times, a guy who's been shipwrecked, a guy who's been persecuted and had been stoned him for his faith in Jesus, but this man is at peace and he could write about peace.

So, in our passage today, he starts off by saying, "Do not be anxious about anything." Now again, I'm like, well, do you know my situation? Paul, you don't know 21st century. You don't know all of my challenges. But Paul had a whole lot of challenges he faced himself. And so with credibility, he says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation..." In every circumstance, whether it's cancer or divorce or loneliness, in every situation, "by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding," which means that there are going to be moments in our lives where the circumstances are beyond what we can control. And he says there's a kind of peace that transcends that, that "will guard both your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6-7)

Now, I love these verses of the Bible. This little passage of Scripture is one of about four or five that has most impacted my life. And a part of the reason why this passage of Scripture has had such a huge impact on me is because anxiety has been a lifelong challenge for me.

Now, there are two important truths about peace I want us to see first off from this passage. The first one is that Paul is helping us understand that

1. Peace is a gift from God.

So notice, he's helping us understand there's a kind of peace that God gives to our life that is different than what the world offers. The world will promise you peace if you can get your circumstances fixed. But God gives a peace that goes into prison cells. God gives a peace that is in the worst conditions of our life, and it's a gift. In Romans 5:1, Paul says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So when Jesus was dying on the cross, he was reconciling us with God through his death on the cross. He was taking the sins of the world and making a payment so that humanity can be reconciled or brought back to the heart of God.

You see, the enemy, Satan, all the way back to the Book of Genesis, when he tempts Adam and Eve, his whole strategy is to cause division. But God's whole strategy is to bring reunification, to bring reconciliation. So, peace is a form of restoration. It's bringing back together what God intended to be one. And God wants that gift of peace to be given into our lives. He gave it to us through his Son Jesus. On the cross, Jesus was stretching his arms out saying, "This is how much I care about you experiencing my peace. I'm willing to die in your place." Peace is a gift that God gives.

And the second part is that

2. Peace requires participation.

And this is where I'm going to spend the bulk of my time today. Peace requires my involvement.

Now if you go to a therapist, or maybe at some point you've been on some form of medicine and you've been involved in a process to get out of anxiety or depression or any mental health challenge that you have faced, if you go through that process, any good therapist is going to say to you, "You have to be involved in

the process." You cannot outsource your mental health to somebody else. And the Bible is very clear. There's an involvement that God invites us into. This verse in Isaiah 26:3 says, "You," speaking of God, "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you." So there's an involvement. God gives a promise of peace, but he also says that you are to be involved. We're to be involved with our minds. Our minds or our thoughts need to be focused on God, trusting God. In doing so, I will experience the peace of God in my life.

So, your participation is needed to experiencing God's peace. How do you do that? Let me share with you now **the key to my participation in my peace**. And what is the key? In our text today, Paul mentions that we need to be prayerful. Thus, **prayer is the key to my participation in my peace**. Basically, he wants us to see the importance of prayer and how prayer can help us to experience God's peace. You see, when I grow in my prayer life, it helps me overcome anxiety. And a part of what is happening in our prayers is that we're taking whatever is weighing us down and bringing it to God. 1 Peter 5:7 says, **"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."** So, Paul is saying, if you're anxious, you can turn to prayer.

Now, there are a few **components of prayer** that Paul highlights in Phil. 4:6-7. The first one is that prayer, first of all, should

1. Be relational.

So he says, **"...by prayer and petition."** Now, prayer, in that phrase connected to the word that is translated as worship, and it means to come towards. It means whenever we pray, you and I are coming towards the presence of God with our concern. Jesus, when he taught us to pray, he said, "This is how to pray. Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." So, the invitation is that God created us for friendship and relationship with him, to be his sons and daughters. In fact, God

initiated this relationship. He's made a way through the cross that by faith in Jesus we can be declared the children of God. So, now we have access to him. And a relationship with him is what he's after.

Today, you might be exploring faith. Today could be the day that you turn to Jesus and you start praying for the very first time, and you ask him for his help. The invitation is to be relationally connected to God. The second thing that Paul is saying is to

2. Be bold.

Paul uses the word "petition." The word petition is a legally-binding word. It's like if you sign a document and you're held to an oath, or it's like when you get a car lease and they come for you and say, "You need to pay your lease."

And somehow what Paul is saying is that in relationship with God, when you come before him, you are praying to a God who always fulfills his Word. You're praying to a God who never changes in his character. You're praying to a God that has given us a book called the Bible that describes who he is and how he interacts with humanity.

And the Bible tells us to not be reticent in coming to him. In fact, we need to be bold because we are his children. Like your kids, they won't have second thoughts about asking you to buy them ice cream or give them allowance or whatever they fancy. That should be our attitude to our Heavenly Father. The Bible actually gives us an image of someone who goes in the middle of the night and knocks on door and asks a friend for a loaf of bread, and the friend gets up not because he is a friend, but he gets up because the guy won't stop knocking. That's what prayer is. It's persistence and boldness. Hebrews 4:14-16 describes the invitation from God to pray boldly. Listen to these words. "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us

hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." And because of this, because now he is interceding or praying on your behalf, it says then, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Heb. 4:14-16)

Folks, God is a holy and righteous God, yet he has made a way, through the cross and the death of Jesus and the payment of sin, that Jesus is now in the inner sanctum of the Father's presence, praying, interceding on your behalf.

Sometimes, I find it amusing. When you ask somebody to pray for you, sometimes Christians have this really weird way of saying, "I'll pray for you," and not praying. That's why I like to say, when somebody says, "Will you pray for me?" I'll say, "Let's pray now, right now, in this moment," because I'll forget. But thank God, Jesus does not forget to pray for us because he is on your prayer team, and he wants to intercede to the Father on your behalf. So there's this invitation for boldness that God gives to us to bring our concerns to him. Pray for him to change your marriage. Pray for your children. Keep praying even decades later. Pray for God to work miraculously in your finances. Pray for God to move forward that vision that he's put inside of your heart. Pray for God to help you overcome that sin tendency that you keep going back to.

"Pray boldly before God," Paul says. "Do this with boldness, petition him." And then the third component is,

3. Be grateful.

He says, "with thanksgiving". Now what he's saying is to come with gratitude. And this gratitude is very fascinating to consider because sometimes you're praying for something that has not yet happened. And this gratitude is a

looking back on what God has done in our lives in the past, but there's an eager anticipation of his faithfulness into the future. So there's this attitude of gratitude. "God, I don't see it in my life yet, but I'm believing by faith and I'm thanking you before it becomes a reality. My heart is grateful because I know you're faithful. My heart is grateful because I've seen you move in the past and I know you'll do it again." So I'm praying with faith to a God that hears me. Be thankful when we pray.

And then finally,

4. Be specific.

Now Paul is saying **present your requests to God** and be specific. Now, I know he didn't mention "be specific" exactly but what else could he mean? If you look at his prayers, he always was specific and he asks people to pray for him and tells them exactly what his requests are. For example, he writes to the Ephesians that he always remembers them in his prayers and **"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you."** (Ephesians 1:17-18) That's very specific, isn't it? It's not just "I pray that you may know him better and you may know the hope he has called you. Another one in Colossians 4:2-4 where he says, **"And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should."**

So, you see, I think part of the reason why we get vague answers to prayer is because we pray vague prayers. We don't ask God specifically for his help with our needs.

I remember years ago, I felt God called me to enter ministry. And to enter ministry, I need to enter seminary. And to enter seminary, I need to enter a building. Well, ok, I'm getting corny again. Well, this is what happened. So, I enrolled as a first-year seminary student of the Southern Baptist Theology Seminary in Kentucky. But I didn't go to Kentucky. They had an extension seminary in New York in Manhattan. At the time, I was working somewhere in New Jersey and so I had to drive from New Jersey to New York.

It was the first day of class, it was starting at 6 PM and so I left my job at 5 pm and, as you know, getting into NY through the Lincoln Tunnel is always an ordeal. Especially during rush hour. Too many cars. And you could imagine, too, that parking in Manhattan at that time is twice an ordeal.

Now, on that day, actually, I was nervous and anxious because it was a new environment for me and new circumstances, and a new challenge. I mean, I've never been to a Bible school before and I didn't know what to expect. I was nervous and I was really wondering whether I made the right decision. Was God really calling me? Did he really want me to enter ministry?

So, as I was driving to 72nd St in Manhattan where the extension seminary was located, I prayed, "Lord, if you really want me there tonight, can you please give me a parking spot?" I thought that was an impossible prayer. And I told myself, if I found it hard to find parking, then I'm going home and that God didn't really call me. So, I was nervous and my heart was beating fast and as I reached 72nd st and drove down the street I could see the building and the long line of cars on my right. It seemed there was no empty spot there and I told myself I'll drive past the building and go home straight. I was getting closer and closer and when I reached the front of the building, lo and behold, there was an empty space in front

of the building which was good enough for my car. It was like just waiting for me. The rest is history.

Folks, we can always ask God for specific things. Some of you you're weighed down, and there's a concern that you've lost hope that God can do it. And I believe God is saying, "I know some of you, it's been years of the same prayer." And God is saying, "Do not give up. Keep coming to me in your fear. Keep coming to me in your worry. Keep coming to me in your concern, and trust me. I am faithful. And even when circumstances are not changing, I'm changing you. I'm working on you, and I want to grant you my peace." So he's inviting us to pray.

Now, Paul makes a beautiful promise following his exhortation to pray:
"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

What is the peace that passes understanding? It's when you're at peace but you have no logical, rational reason for it. You just lost your job but somehow you're at peace about it. Why? The Lord is your shepherd. You just heard the dreaded word "cancer" from the doctor. For some reason, you have peace about the situation. Why? The Lord is your shepherd. Just keep giving your worries to him. He can handle it. Like when the doctor said I had a malignant tumor in my kidney, I didn't worry about it or become agitated. I had peace inside of me that I couldn't explain.

The phrase "will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" signifies a protective role. So, the peace of God acts like a sentinel over our thoughts and emotions. In a world that continuously bombards us with anxiety-inducing messages, we need this peace to provide cover for our hearts and our minds.

When we faithfully bring our worries to God, we invite His peace to envelop our lives.

Folks, if you know how to worry, you know how to meditate. Meditation is simply focusing on one thought over and over. So, take the skills you use when you worry, and instead meditate on God's Word. Start with a small portion of Scripture. First, read the passage slowly, perhaps out loud a few times, placing emphasis on different words or phrases. Second, reflect on the truth of the text. Third, respond to God in light of what you've just read. This may be quietly or out loud. Fourth, rest in the Word of God, listening for what God has to say through the Scripture.

Would you rather have your worries or God's Word running through your head? Do something about it today: Confess your worry, and then fill your mind with God's truth found in the Bible. And then, pray.

Shall we pray?