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Reading: Matthew 6:5-13 & Philippians 4:4-9

Title: The Answer To Anxiety



Introduction

This morning I want to speak to the Gems and Cadets, and all the young people in the room. Everyone else here can eavesdrop if they want, but this morning I just want to talk to you guys. And I want to start by talking to you about worry.

Do you worry? Do you ever get anxious? I do. Often when I get into bed at night and start trying to fall asleep, that's when I realize how anxious I am. My mind is spinning, thinking about all sorts of different things. I worry about how much work I have to do. I worry about my family. Sometimes I worry about being a pastor, and how I don't feel capable of doing my job. Sometimes I worry about what people think of me.

I wonder what it is for you. There are lots of things in life that can make us anxious, afraid, stressed, worried. Maybe it's your schoolwork and your grades. You don't understand something, or you struggle to concentrate, or you're worried about how it will affect your future.

Maybe it's your relationships with other people that make you anxious. Friendship issues, bullying, trying to fit in. Struggles at home, maybe there's tension between your parents. Maybe you're stressed about your body image, or about your mental health.

Sometimes we can worry about the state of the world, about politics, about climate change. According to some studies, more than half of teenagers are worried about climate change. They call it 'climate anxiety'. Young people today are more worried than almost any other generation in history, because of the internet. Because we know *so much* about what's going on in the world. We're bombarded with problems, with disasters, with threats. And yet almost all of it is completely beyond our control. The only thing we can do is worry.

Maybe for you it's nothing in particular, but it's just *the future*. The unknown. Maybe you're just really aware that bad things happen. Maybe you're scared of a loved one dying. Or your scared of your own death. Or of your salvation. You worry about whether or not you're really a Christian. You worry about your sin. You worry about eternity.

Or maybe it's just something really simple. Maybe you're scared of the dark, or of birds, or of being in busy public places. Maybe you get anxious when you're alone, or when you're around people, or even both.

Well, this morning I want you to know that you're not alone. I struggle with anxiety too. In fact, there are a lot of adults in the room right now who are nodding their heads. Even Paul, who wrote the book of Philippians, had lots of things to be worried about. He was stuck in prison, and he wasn't sure if he'd get out, or if he might even be executed... and he often worried about all the churches he was leading. Actually, it's amazing to see how often the Bible talks about fear, and anxiety, and worry. It comes up again and again and again... because God knows that humans really struggle with this.

So I want you to know that you're not alone. But I also want you to know something else. I want you to know that there's *hope*. That there's a *solution*. Did you know that there's actually a cure for anxiety? And I'm not just talking about trying to think positive thoughts, or about practicing steady breathing... even though those things can be helpful. I'm talking about a cure that is incredibly

powerful, a cure that can absolutely transform your life... and yet it's *really simple*. It's so simple that you can do it right now, where you're sitting.

Here it is. I'm going to read **Philippians 4:6-7**. Listen closely. '*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*'

Did you notice how Paul begins? He says, 'Do not be anxious about anything.' That's a command! 'Don't be anxious.' For some of us, this command might actually make us more anxious! Maybe we feel afraid because we can't obey it. Maybe we feel guilty because we can't stop being fearful.

But think about this. There are two ways I could give this command. I could say, '*Do not be anxious about anything!*' [harsh]. Or I could say, '*Don't be anxious about anything*' [gentle]. Which do you think it is in this passage? Well, look at what Paul says just before this. 'The Lord is near.' Isn't that beautiful? Like a dad who comes into your room at night when you've had a bad dream, wraps his arms around you, and says 'I'm here. You're safe. Don't be anxious about anything.' Full of grace, full of understanding, totally aware of all our anxieties, your heavenly Father says to you, 'Don't be anxious. I know you often get worried. But you don't need to.' So if you've been thinking thoughts like, 'I can't help it, I'm just an anxious person,' then you need to hear God say to you, 'You can help it. It's possible to not be anxious. There is a cure.'

Pray

Well, what is this simple and spectacular cure? Paul says, 'Do not be anxious about anything, *but instead, pray.*' Pray. That's it. What do we pray about? About *everything*. Paul says, 'In every situation... present your requests to God.' Paul uses a number of different words: prayer, petition, requests. But there's no big difference between them. He's just trying to say, *bring it all*. All our worries, concerns, requests, problems, needs... bring them all to God. Because God's not stingy or grumpy or reluctant. He's bending down to listen. He already knows what you need, but he wants to hear your voice.

Do you feel like you have free access to God, anytime, about anything? He's not like a grumpy teacher who says, 'No talking, no questions, just get on with it.' You don't have to tentatively put up your hand and say, 'I'm so sorry to bother you again, but I've thought of something else. God doesn't think of you as an annoying fly, buzzing around, that he wishes he could just swat away. No! He's always available. He's always interested. He's never too busy for you, never asleep, never in a bad mood. He never says, 'Is that it? Is that all you interrupted me for?' He is so glad to hear from you. It brings him joy, it honours him, it pleases him.

So Paul says, the cure to being anxious about *anything* is to pray about *everything*. But why? **Why pray?** What happens when we pray? Well, prayer put things into perspective.

I read a story this week about a girl who wrote to her parents from university. *Dear Mum and Dad, Just thought I'd drop you a note to let you know what's going on. I've fallen in love with a guy called Jim. He quit high school in Year 11 to get married, but it didn't work out and he's been divorced for about a year now. Jim and I have been dating for a few months, and we plan to get married in summer. Until then, I've decided to move into his apartment. I hate to admit it, but I'm having a problem with drugs. Also, I think I'm pregnant. So anyway, I dropped out of Uni last week, even though I'm hoping to finish my degree one day in the future.*

Then, as the parents turned the letter over, they read this: *Mum and Dad, I want you to know that everything I've written so far is false. None of it is true. But it is true that I got a C in French and that I failed a math test. I just wanted to put things in perspective.*

Sometimes our worries and anxieties can seem so big that they blind us. They can seem bigger than they really are. But praying helps to put them into perspective. Let's do a little experiment. Take your hand and put it over your eyes. Your hand is so big that you can't even see! But now take your hand away and put it out in front of you. Your hand doesn't look that big now, does it? And you can see now too, can't you? You can see your hand, but you can also see all around you.

When we're overwhelmed by negatives, by problems, by fears... prayer helps us to get perspective. What perspective? That God is enormous, and awesome, and totally in control... and so we don't need to be worried. Prayer focuses us on God. It invites God into our situation.

You know how boats have anchors that they drop down to the ocean floor, to keep them steady in the storm? Well, prayer is like an anchor for your life. It anchors you to God. If you just try to think positive thoughts and work harder and distract yourself with Tik Tok, that's not very secure. It's like hooking your anchor onto a floating bit of seaweed. But when you pray, you're attaching your anchor to the eternal, rock-solid, super-loving life of God himself.

And I think that's why Paul adds 'with thanksgiving.' Did you notice that? He talks about prayers and petitions and requests, but then he adds 'with thanksgiving.' As we pray about anything and everything, Paul also wants us to remember to give thanks. 'God, thank you for that I can pray to you. Thank you that you're listening. Thank you that you're in control, even though I'm not. Thank you that your plans are always good, even when I can't see what's going on. Thank you for my Saviour Jesus, who loves me and forgives me and protects me from death. Thank you that I have nothing to fear!'

What a great thing to do when we're anxious! To stop and see our blessings, to notice all God's gifts to us, and to thank him for them. Like taking your hand away from your eyes, finding reasons to thank God helps us to get perspective.

Peace

Alright, so we've talked about the problem of anxiety, and we've talked about the practical solution: pray. But before we finish, we also need to take a look at **the amazing promise** in verse 7. Paul says, 'Here's what happens when you pray to God about everything: *the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*'

What happens when we pray? We find peace. We're no longer anxious, but peaceful. Now, I'm sorry, but I can't explain to you how this peace works. No one can. You can't put this peace under a microscope and study it. Paul says, this peace 'transcends all understanding.'

But here's what we do know: it's real. Prayer really works! This week I've been asking quite a few people in our church about this passage and what they think. And do you know what the most common thing they said was? It's so true! *It really works!* Bringing everything to God in prayer really does bring peace. Young people, I want you to know that this morning. That you're surrounded by adults who struggle, and get anxious, and find life really hard. But time and again, they've found peace when they've prayed. Again and again they've experienced the fact that God really is there, and he really does give us peace when we pray.

This verse doesn't say that God will give you everything you ask for. Did you notice that? It says he will give you peace. It's not peace because everything is suddenly easy and all your problems have gone away. It's peace because even though things are hard, God is with you. God is guarding you. I love that picture of being *guarded by peace*! It's like an army of soldiers protecting us all the time. It's like one of those huge inflatable balls that you can climb inside, and then you can roll down the hill, totally protected inside this big bubble.

I don't know what the future holds. Neither do you. I'm sure it will have many challenges. But if you trust in Jesus, you're completely safe. Not even death can hurt you. With Jesus, you're never alone. You always have a friend you can talk to. You don't even have to get out your phone to send him message. You can just talk to him in your head, any time, all the time.

And this friend doesn't just say, 'Oh that sucks. I'm sorry to hear that. That must be really hard.' No, this friend owns the universe. He's the Lord. He knows what will happen in 2050. He knows how many days you'll live, and everything that will happen on every one of those days. He's got it all sorted. You can trust him.

No wonder Paul says, 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.'

Conclusion

So, as we wrap up, I just want you to stop for a moment and think about some of things that are worrying you. What comes to mind? What bubbles up? What's making you anxious? What are you concerned about for tomorrow, for next week, for next year?

Whatever just popped into your head, I want you to know that God cares about it. He really, really cares. In 1 Peter 5 it says, 'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.' And God doesn't just say, 'Stop worrying! Snap out of it.' That's like lying in bed when your brain is spinning 100 kph and saying, 'Just stop and go to sleep!' It doesn't work! Instead, God gives us something practical to do. Something simple and yet so powerful. He says, bring it to me. Talk to me about it. All of it.

So I want to ask you a question: When did you last take some time to really pray about the things that are worrying you? When was the last time you went through them, one by one, and handed each of them over to God?

Maybe you can do this at night in bed, before you go to sleep. Maybe you want to write these things down in a journal. Maybe you need to start talking to God during the day, whenever you need to.

Sometimes, we actually really struggle to pray for ourselves. But the awesome thing is, we're not alone. God gives us each other. If you're struggling, why not reach out to your parents, or your Cadets and Gems leaders, or your friends... and I know they would absolutely love to pray for you!

And as we pray, let's remember this. The power of prayer isn't in our words... it's in the one we pray to. You can stutter and stumble all you want, that's totally fine. You don't have to have any answers to your problems. You can lay them out with no idea what will happen. The power isn't in your prayer. It's in the one who you pray to.